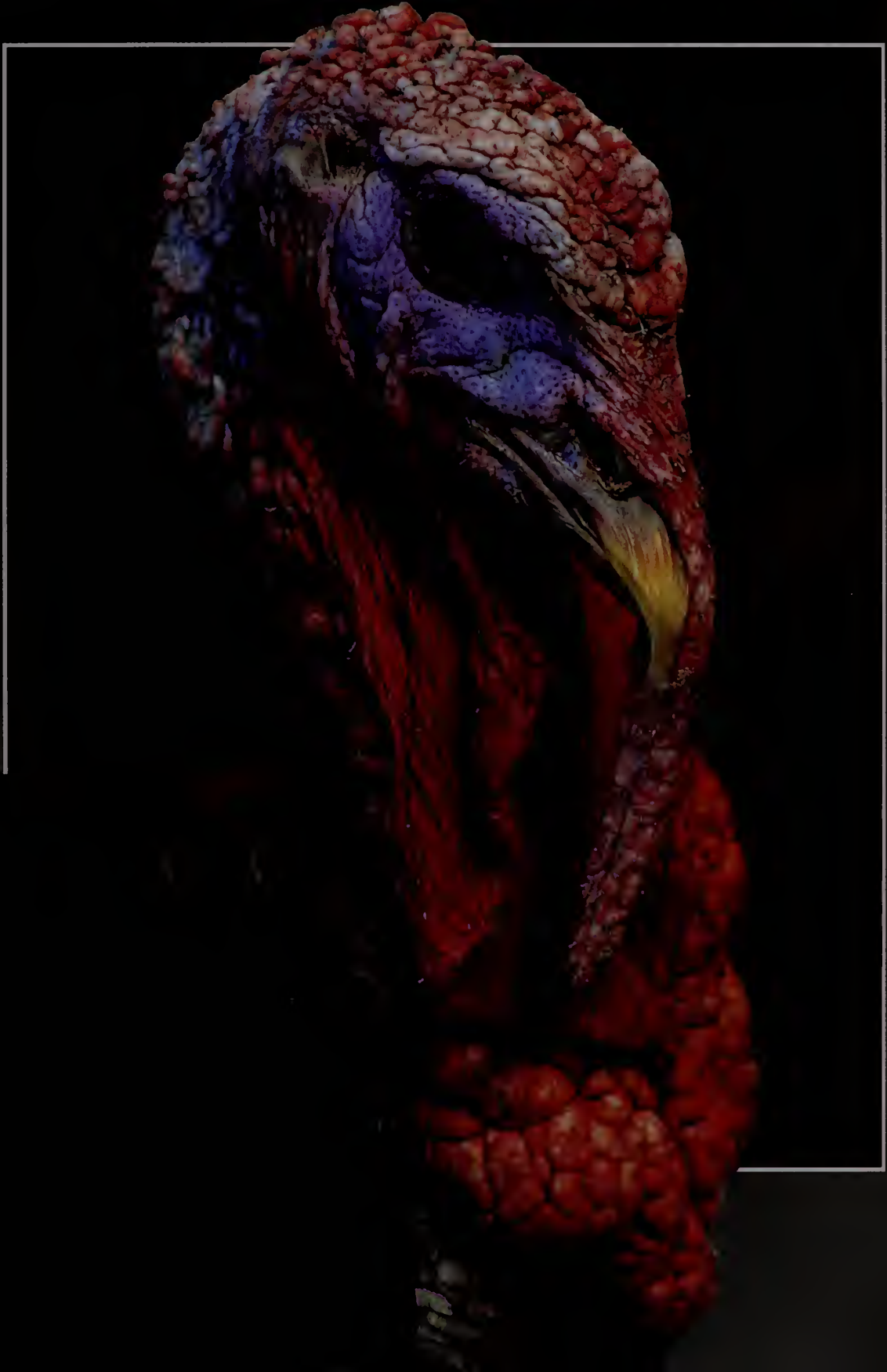


# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE





## Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr



It's always refreshing for me this time of year to see and hear the first signs of spring. In a temperate year the gentle cries of the spring peeper fill the air as it emerges each afternoon to warm itself. The swaying of bird feeders throughout my yard as they start to fill with a host of new feathered neighbors begins to excite me with the anticipation of another great year in the outdoors.

With the new year comes some great things. We're happy to have The Honorable John Paul Woodley, Jr. on board as our new Secretary of Natural Resources. Mr. Woodley, a lawyer, has served with Governor Gilmore since the latter was Henrico County's Commonwealth Attorney.

We're also delighted to announce that longtime contributor to *Virginia Wildlife*, Spike Knuth, will be writing and illustrating a new column each month entitled "Naturally Wild."

Spike Knuth's career as a wildlife artist is both the result and the sign of a deep and enduring fascination with the natural world. As a boy in Wisconsin, much of his time was spent watching and sketching birds, and fishing on Lake Okawchee. He kept nature journals on the birds that filled Horicon Marsh and Lake Winnebago with color and movement. His parents nurtured this interest, buying him field guides and fishing rods, and taking him for long walks by the water. By the time he was 12, Spike had discovered two things: that the

variation in nature was "never ending"; and that trying to capture that variation made him happy. Time and different jobs led him to experiment with different media: patterns of paint, patterns of words, and images burned into film. And although many would say that his efforts have been successful; Spike feels that he still has "so much to learn," that it would take "seven lifetimes" to study and set down the wildlife around him. We here at the Virginia Game Department hope that you will enjoy Spike's latest effort for our magazine.



*The Honorable John Paul Woodley, Jr., Secretary of Natural Resources was sworn into office on January 20, 1998. The Secretary of Natural Resources oversees eight state agencies and serves as Virginia's principal environmental policy maker. The Secretary and his agencies encourage and assist Virginians in their efforts to maintain and preserve the natural and historical resources of the Commonwealth.*

*Secretary Woodley received his bachelor of arts degree from Washington & Lee in 1974 and also attended law*

*school at Washington & Lee, where he received his juris doctor degree cum laude in 1977. After receiving his law degree, Secretary Woodley served with the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's Corps until 1985. From 1985 to 1990, he was in private practice of law. In 1990, then Henrico County's Commonwealth Attorney Jim Gilmore appointed Mr. Woodley Assistant Commonwealth Attorney for Henrico County. In 1994, Mr. Woodley joined Gilmore at the Attorney General's Office as Deputy Attorney General for Government Operations.*

*Secretary Woodley, 44, resides in Henrico County with his wife, Priscilla Ingersoll Woodley, who is a graduate of Yale University, and received her law degree from American University in 1979. She is Adjunct Assistant Professor of Law at T.C. Williams School of Law at the University of Richmond. Together with their three children, Elizabeth (11), Cornelia (9), and John Paul III (6) they enjoy being in the outdoors, sailing, snow skiing, and camping with their Girl Scout daughters at Virginia's State Parks.*

### Mission Statement

*To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.*



Commonwealth of Virginia  
James S. Gilmore III, Governor

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# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Cover: Wild turkey photo by ©Lynda Richardson

Back cover: Baby screech owl photo by ©Bill Lea

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*Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources*

VOLUME 59

NUMBER 3

# The Making of a



***In today's world  
only the best  
of the best  
will do.***

by Carol Mawyer

**B**arnes, McCuiston, Williams, Neel, Phillips, Fleming, Hopson, Crosby and Heine. Nine individuals from cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth and North Carolina who shared one collective goal—to become Virginia State Game Wardens.

## *A select group*

From a numerical perspective, these nine are an elite group. Some 1150 individuals submitted applications to become wildlife enforcement officers. Eight men and one

woman were chosen to begin the journey toward becoming the newest group of Virginia game wardens.

For Shawn Hopson becoming a game warden was a lifelong dream. "I knew what a game warden was at the age of 8. By the time I was 13, I'd eliminated all other options of employment," he said. For Rob Barnes it was a matter of family tradition. "My father is a New York State Trooper, my mother works in the District Attorney's office, and my grandfather was a New York State Game Warden. I honestly couldn't see myself doing anything else as a career," he explained. Both Barnes and Hopson enjoyed hunting and fishing since they were young boys.

However, the basic requirements for becoming a game warden involve much more than the wish to be one coupled with an enjoyment of the out-of-doors. Candidates

must meet specific physical and psychological standards. They must possess a basic knowledge of Virginia's game, fish and boating regulations; and they must have no police record.

Each of the nine officer recruits had experience in hunting, fishing or wildlife management. Rob Fleming served for a year as an Henrico County deputy sheriff. Beth Williams was a National Park Ranger for six years. Seven earned Bachelor degrees; two earned Associate degrees.

Of the original 1150 applicants, slightly more than half were selected and tested on their basic knowledge of fish, game and boating regulations. From this





# Game Warden



group, approximately 130 applicants were interviewed with 30 meeting the stringent requirements for background checks and the next stage of the interview process. Williams and eight men came out at the top of the applicant pool and were given the opportunity to participate in the 35-week Game Warden Training Program.

## *Back to school*

After a one-week orientation in Richmond with Lt. Bobby Mawyer, VDGIF training officer, the Department's nine recruits traveled to Lynchburg to begin Basic Law Enforcement School. These future offi-

cers were joined by officer recruits from 10 other Central Virginia law enforcement agencies and comprised the 47th Basic School.

The 16-week basic school, held at the Central Virginia Criminal Justice Academy in Lynchburg, is compared by many as similar to the college experience. The comparison is a fair one. The Academy, located downtown in the city's renovated Armory, resembles an historic college building minus the ivy. The officer recruits reside in nearby hotel rooms that take on the look of dormitory rooms by the second week into basic school. After a week away from home, the officers quickly de-

*Left: Dallas Neel at swearing in ceremony having the badge of Virginia Game Warden pinned on by his father. The Honorable William W. Sweeney (center). Bottom (l to r): Shawn Hopson, Rob Fleming, Marshall Crosby, Owen Heine, Col. Jeff Uerz, Jeff McCuistion, Rob Barnes, Troy Phillips, Bill Woodfin, Lt. Bobby Mawyer, Beth Williams, and Dallas Neel. Out of 1150 applicants who applied for the position of Virginia Game Warden in 1997, only nine were selected to wear the badge.*



terminated certain comfort items that were necessary for making it through a 16-week period in a hotel room—small refrigerators, compact disk systems, a personal food supply and pictures of family and girlfriends.

Classroom sessions are held Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. with a break for lunch. Occasionally night classes are scheduled. And there's studying. "A lot of it," says Dallas Neel. "The first three weeks were totally academic with back-to-back tests."

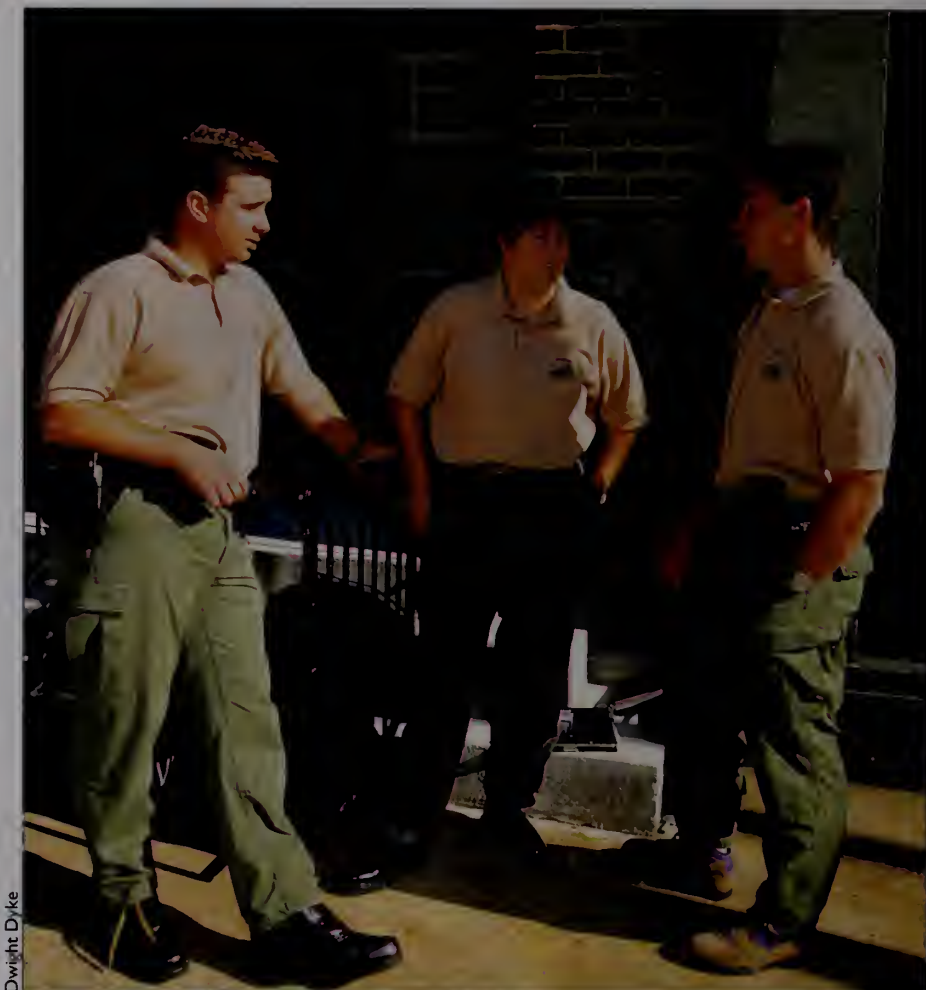
Grades are a serious matter. The Academy program tests students to 100 percent meaning students are re-tested on material they miss until they earn a perfect score on an exam. Any grade lower than 70 percent results in immediate expulsion from the program.

"The most difficult part of the Academy program was the initial adjustment to studying," said Fleming. After a long day in class, the group would eat dinner and head back to their rooms for several hours of studying.

The Department provides each officer recruit with a laptop computer and printer the first week of school. By the end of Basic School each officer has a uniform, rain gear, a car or truck, radios, firearms, accident investigation kits, an Alco-Sensor and a summons book. "The Department places a high priority on providing officers with the equipment they need in order to perform their job," said Lt. Mawyer.

Classroom sessions addressed information pertinent to law enforcement including such topics as court systems, laws of arrest, search and seizure, rules of evidence and shooting liability. Each topic built upon a previous one. Two days were spent on interviews and interrogation. Three days were given to alcohol enforcement issues.

More time was spent on still weightier subjects. A week was designated for reviewing Virginia Criminal Law and the Motor Vehicle Code of Virginia. Another week was set aside to complete Emergency Medical Services' First Responder

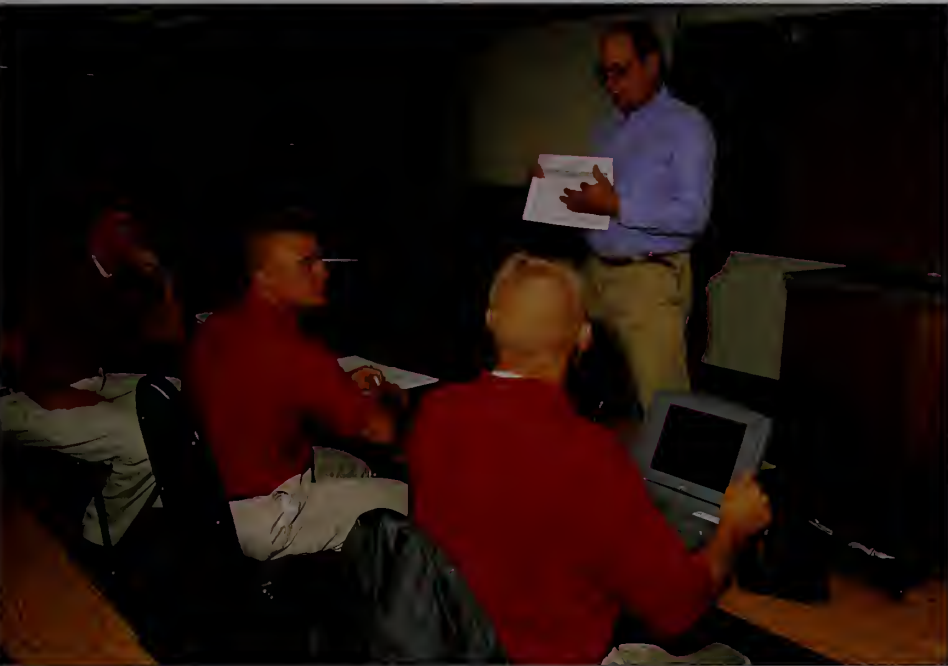


Dwight Dyke

Dwight Dyke

*Top: Jeff McCuiston (left) practices proper arrest procedures. Bottom: The first three weeks of the Academy are back-to-back testing, here Troy Phillips (left), Beth Williams (middle), and Shawn Hopson (right) reflect on the results of their latest test scores.*





**Top:** Assistant Director of the Central Virginia Criminal Justice Academy, Troy Nicks, teaches Owen Heine (center), Rob Fleming (right), and Dallas Neel (sitting) that computers are now an essential tool in law enforcement work. **Bottom:** Terrell Griffin, Director of the Central Virginia Criminal Justice Academy, works directly with recruits in classroom training of current Virginia law.

Course. Officer recruits took the state exam and became certified.

Academy students were challenged by the best of the best. Instructors, provided by local, state and federal agencies and certified by the Department of Criminal Justice System, are experts in their respective fields. They provided stimulating discussion in the classroom and real life experience outside of it.

## Out of the classroom

On occasion, the desks and chairs were left behind. Hands-on instruction was offered in defensive driving, firearms training, crime scene investigation, crisis intervention and defensive tactics, a favorite of many recruits.

One-on-one instruction came into play as officer recruits moved into the Armory's first floor gymnasium for a week of defensive tactics (DT) training. A team of DT instructors taught students a continuum of tactics ranging from verbal commands to the use of deadly force. A variety of holds, moves and approaches were first demonstrated by instructors and then practiced by students in pairs—again and again and again. Explained Neel, "Defensive tactics is a lot like golf, the more you practice the better you become."

Despite several bruises, and a cut eye among the group, Barnes spoke for everyone when he said the training was a welcome change from the monotony of the classroom.

"Strength, flexibility and size are important," said Sgt. Charlie Mullins, the Department's chief defensive tactics instructor, "but it's technique that has the biggest bearing on how effective one is in using these tactics to defend himself. Knowing the elements and factors to consider in determining which level of force to use also helps build an officer's confidence."

Even the best drivers were challenged in the Academy's defensive driving course. Recruits were taught how to handle police vehicles during normal and adverse conditions and in daylight and at night. They became familiar with the capabilities and limitations of both their vehicles and themselves as they maneuvered through serpentine drills, dodged cones in off-set alleys and practiced braking techniques.

During a week-long firearms session officer recruits received extensive training in the use of deadly force. Computer controlled scenarios tested their accuracy and judgment in shoot- or don't-shoot situations. Recruits fired more than 800



Dwight Dyke

*Recruits like Troy Phillips, will learn proper care of their new handguns and shotguns and fire more than 800 rounds at targets as close as three feet to as far away as 25 yards during their stay at the Academy.*

rounds at targets as close as three feet to as far away as 25 yards. They also learned proper care of their new handguns and shotguns. For Owen Heine, who prior to the beginning of basic school had never held a handgun, the instruction was right on the mark. He shot the highest score of the nine game warden recruits.

The Academy challenges its students not only academically, but physically as well. Mornings began at 6:00 a.m. with more than an hour of physical training that included running, aerobics and weight lifting. For Jeff McCuiston, getting up at 5:30 a.m. to get to the YMCA was the hardest part of basic school.

The physical training paid off. Officer recruits not only sharpened their minds and learned new skills, they toned muscles and improved their overall physical condition. Students competed in five areas—a 1½ mile run, bench press, push-ups, sit-ups and flexibility. To ensure fairness, each competition was adjusted for age and gender.

The Department's officer recruits learned much more than the Code of Virginia, defensive driving and how to shoot a firearm. They also learned the importance of teamwork. They developed a unique camaraderie and over the course of the 16-week basic school awarded each other with nicknames. Neel became "Meathead" because of his background with the Marine Corps. Phillips was dubbed "Spuds" for his love of potatoes. "Puddin'", "Scooter" and "Skippy" were jokingly bestowed on the others.

These newfound friendships played an important role for many of the recruits who were living apart from wives, toddlers, fiancées and girlfriends. Marshall Crosby, who became engaged prior to accepting employment with the Department, squeezed in a wedding and an overnight honeymoon one weekend during basic school. He said his new wife "is nervous and excited, yet very supportive."



The Central Virginia Criminal Justice Academy program changed a group of ordinary citizens into highly trained law enforcement officials. Game warden recruits were sworn in as police officers at the Lynchburg City Courthouse in front of family, friends and other officers. The Honorable William W. Sweeney charged the officers to use sound

judgement in discharging their duties in a fair and impartial manner and to treat each individual as they themselves would like to be treated. Each new warden was pinned with the shiny gold badge of the Department.

### *To the field*

Less than 24 hours after being

sworn in, Virginia's nine newest game wardens left Lynchburg for their assigned counties and to begin the second phase of their 35-week training. The next 12 weeks were spent in the company of their Field Training Officer (FTO), a veteran game warden responsible for providing the new officer with on-the-job training. FTO's work closely



Dwight Dyke

*Hands-on training is a big part of the learning process. Instruction in defensive driving, firearms training, crime scene investigations, crisis intervention and defensive tactics help prepare students for what awaits them in the real world.*



Carol Mawyer



Carol Mawyer



with new game wardens to familiarize him or her with the new work area and ensure the proper application of skills learned in Basic School.

After a week in the field, the nine returned to Lynchburg for the formalities of a banquet and the Academy graduation ceremony. The Department's nine officers were recognized for their performances and took several top honors in the CVC-JAs 47th Basic School. Neel performed best (quickest time, fewest disturbed cones) on the driving course and received the class award for defensive driving. Hopson took the award for best physical fitness. Williams took the award for best overall improvement in physical fitness. McCuiston, who struggled to get up in the mornings after self-imposed evening study sessions, claimed the class's academic award with a 98.9 percent average. His first place ranking among the nine game warden recruits earned him first choice of available work locations. He chose Mathews County.

The others are spread throughout the state. Hopson is in Brunswick County. Phillip is in Buchanan County. Barnes and Fleming went to Powhatan and Chesterfield Counties respectively. Crosby took his new bride to Chesapeake. Williams and her husband moved to Westmoreland County. Neel opted for Richmond County and Heine, the youngest member of the group, settled in Southampton County.

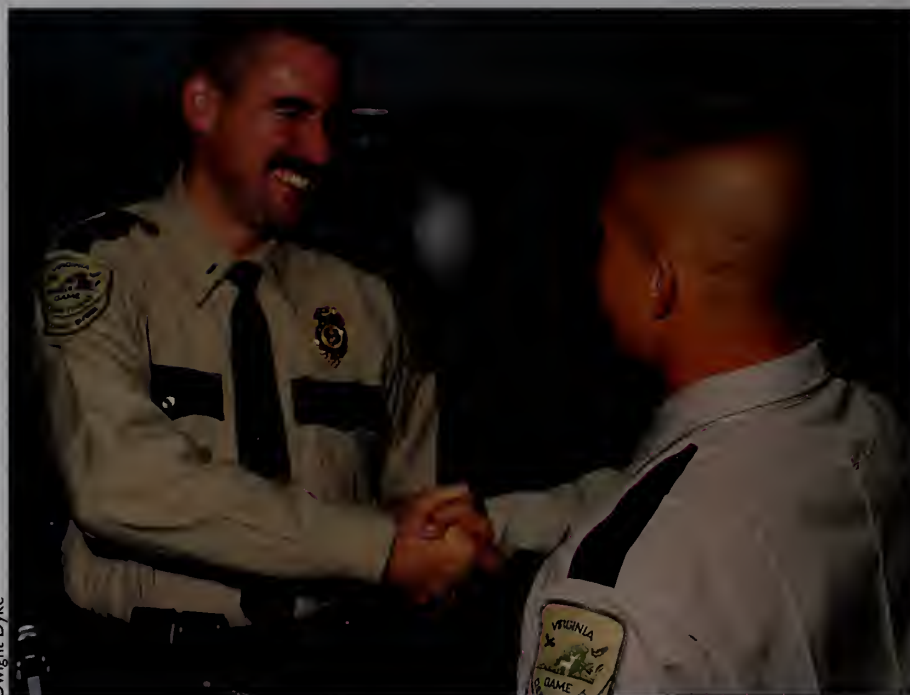
Although they're in different localities, their initial experiences in the field as new officers have been the same. Crosby excitedly described his first week as "awesome."

### *On their own*

This spring these officers will travel from their assigned counties to Richmond for a final six weeks of study on game, fish and boating laws. Although this session will complete their initial training, opportunities for learning and advancement are ever present with bi-annual in-service training and special seminars. And Officers Barnes, McCuiston, Williams, Neel, Phillips, Fleming, Hopson, Crosby and



Dwight Dyke



Dwight Dyke

Heine will continue to call on each other for support and advice, just as they did in basic school.

Only in a different manner. Instead of hollering "Puddin'", they'll radio "Unit 142." □

*Carol Mawyer is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife magazine.*

**Top:** Beth Williams is sworn in. All recruits who graduate and are sworn in, are charged to use sound judgement in discharging their duties in a fair and impartial manner and to treat each individual as they themselves would like to be treated.

**Bottom:** After 16 weeks of intensive training, Law Enforcement training officer, Lt. Bobby Mawyer, congratulates each new warden at graduation.



# Top 10 Spots for Spring CRAPPIES



Black crappie by ©F. Eugene Hester

by Gerald Almy

**T**hough crappies are usually thought of as a big-lake fish, some of my fondest memories of pursuing this quarry focus on ponds. As a teenager, I'd pile into the red pickup my friend's father owned and we'd head for a secluded two-acre body of water on the Northern Neck with our johnboat tied in the back. How he ever found

*No matter  
where you live  
in Virginia,  
you're only a short  
drive to great  
crappie fishing.*

the spot, I never knew, but the timber-clogged pond tucked in a hollow amid soybean and corn fields held an abundance of crappies that weighed three-quarters of a pound and up.

We would bait up with shiners on 10 foot cane poles and drift through the openings between the flooded trees. Hangups were common, but in between them we also pulled in a slab crappie every five or ten min-

utes until the cooler was nearly full of the delectable speckled black and white fish. A bass or two would join them, along with a few dark-purple and copper-colored bluegills. But it was the crappie that drew us there.

Later, when I got the keys to my own second-hand pickup, a friend and I made annual pilgrimages to Santee-Cooper, in South Carolina, and spent three dawn-to-dark days fishing for crappies in the flooded cypress trees every March. But soon we discovered the same quality fishing could be found in some of the bigger impoundments of our home state such as Kerr, Gaston and Smith Mountain—with a lot shorter drive.

While there are still ponds that offer quality crappie fishing in Virginia like the one I got started on, they are the exception rather than the rule. (Usually when crappies are introduced to ponds they become overpopulated and stunted.) The best crappie fishing in Virginia takes place in lakes ranging in size from 50 acres or so up to sprawling impoundments like Buggs Island, covering 48,900 acres.

If you want to seek out the very biggest crappies of all in the state, the place to look is the annual citation list. Top waters for citations in 1996 were Buggs Island, Smith Mountain, Lake Chesdin and Anna, in that order. Each produced 19-30 fish qualifying for awards (over two pounds).

But whether you're looking for a citation or just an average-sized fish in the ½-¾ pound range, there's no better time to go after crappies than now, when the fish are swarming in the shallows feeding and mating near brush, fallen timber, dock pilings and beaver huts. Don't overlook the fish as summer settles in, either, though. Often by simply moving to deeper waters near spring spawning areas and fishing over dropoffs, sunken islands, bridge abutments and flooded timber at levels of 8-25 feet, you can catch these scrappy panfish right through the heat of summer. For spring fishing, concentrate on shallow cover such as brush, timber and docks near shore or slightly deeper water



©Dwight Dyke

just back from the cover where the fish congregate before moving in to spawn. Minnows and jigs are the two top baits, but spinners, spoons and streamers will also produce.

Here's a look at some of the best waters in the state to try this spring for crappies. Certainly there are many other good spots to sample, but these are a few you can count on for good sport for one of our state's finest-tasting freshwater fish.

## 1. Buggs Island Lake

This unquestionably is the number one crappie lake in Virginia. Kerr Reservoir, as it's also known, sprawls over 48,900 acres and spills into North Carolina. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' lake offers both white and black crappies in good numbers and huge sizes. In fact, Buggs Island produced the all-tackle world record in 1981, when Carl Herring pulled in a

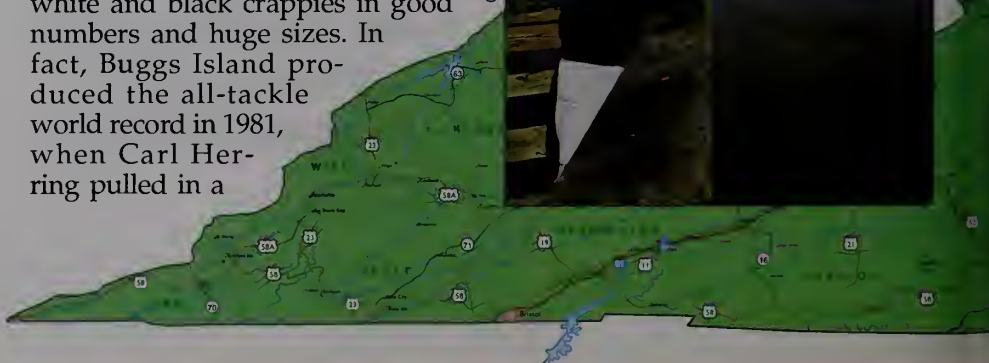
*Whether you're fishing large impoundments like Buggs Island or wetting a line off the bank of your favorite pond, crappies can be found in good numbers throughout most of Virginia. (Right) Map showing locations of the top ten fishing spots.*

4 pound, 8 ounce black crappie, according to International Game Fish Association records.

Every year fish in the two-pound and up class are caught, and March and April are the top months for pulling in these slabsided speci-



©Dwight Dyke





mens. For black crappies, concentrate on the clearer parts of the lake. For whites, look to more turbid areas. Often, though, you'll catch a mixture of both varieties in spring.

March action centers in the various tributary arms of the lake. Good bets to try include Nutbush, Flat, Anderson, Swamp, Beaver, Grassy, Buckhorn Island and Mill on the south shore, Bluestone, Eastland, Butchers and Rudds on the north shore. Begin near the mouths of these creeks close to shore in water 8-15 feet deep. If you don't connect, move further into the creeks and shallower, working the brush and flooded timber near banks and dropoffs just off shore. Fish should be starting to spawn right now, but will drop off back into deeper creek channels in late April and May, slowly filtering back to the main lake near deep cover and bridge pilings.

When fishing for crappies tight along shore in flooded brush, try a cane pole or long fly rod and dip either minnows beneath a cylindrical

float or tiny jigs next to flooded brush and willow trees. Expect to catch 10-25 fish for a day's effort, with several likely weighing over a pound.

## 2. Smith Mountain Lake

This 20,600 acre lake in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains has gained national fame as a freshwater striped bass destination, but the Appalachian Power Company lake is also a top spot for crappies. Last year it yielded only one less citation crappie than Kerr (29).

Although it's mostly a "clean" lake, there are some fallen trees and brush along shore. If you can locate these either with your eyes or with a depth finder, you've likely found a crappie magnet. Also good are the lake's many dock pilings. Not all of them hold fish, but by moving from dock to dock

you'll find the ones that produce.

Minnows fished on long-shank size 2 or 4 gold hooks rigged 4-8 feet beneath a bobber are hard to beat. Another option is casting small marabou jigs or Charlie Brewer Slid-er grubs on light spin gear and retrieving them slowly and steadily. If no strikes come, try pausing part way back to let the grub or jig sink deeper.

I've had luck on both the Blackwater and Roanoke River arms of the lake, but usually the best crappie action comes in the upper lake in the Roanoke River arm.

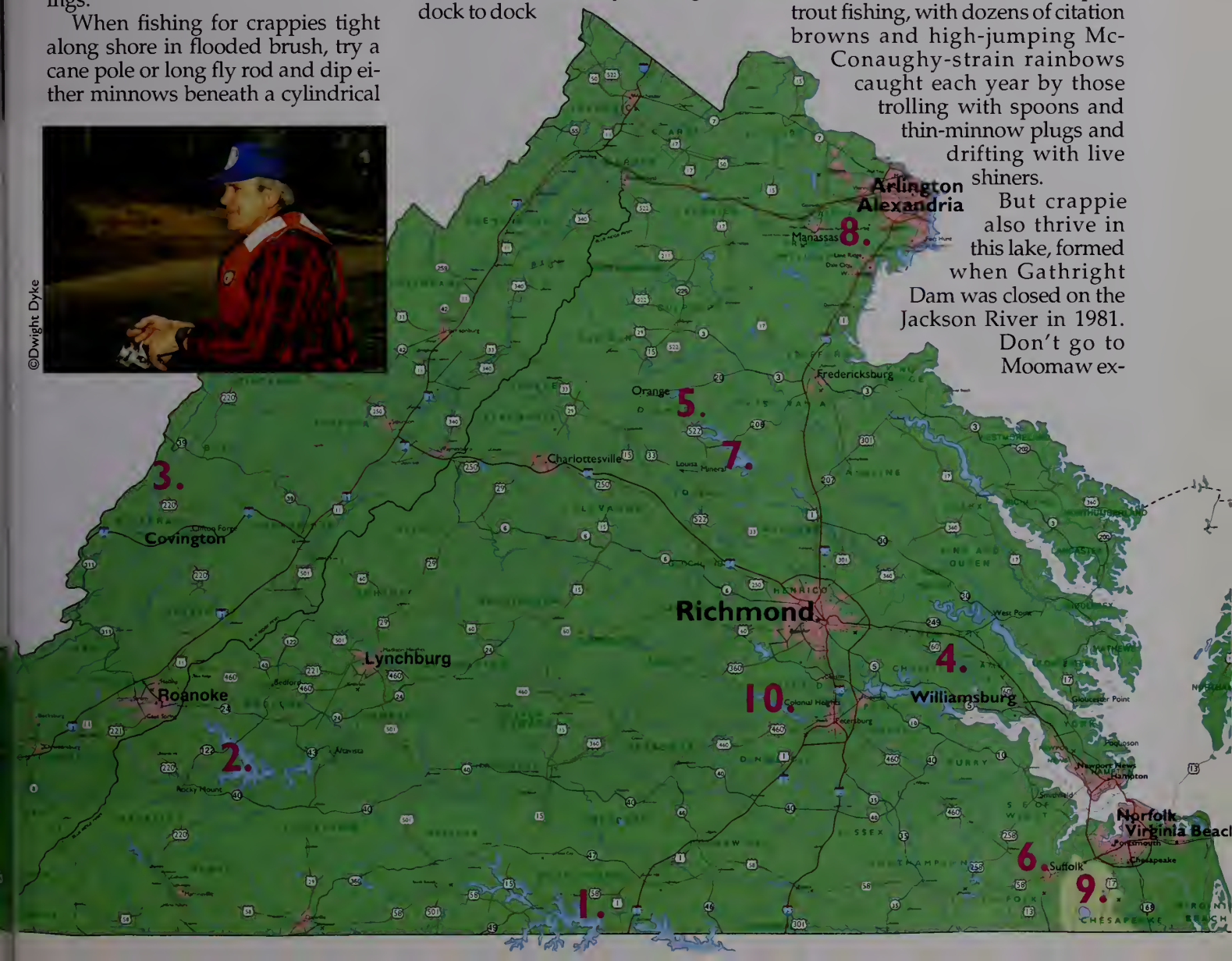
## 3. Moomaw Lake

This is another lake that's best known for a different species than crappie. The Corps of Engineers' lake in the George Washington National Forest is famous for its superb trout fishing, with dozens of citation browns and high-jumping Mc-Conaughy-strain rainbows caught each year by those trolling with spoons and thin-minnow plugs and drifting with live shiners.

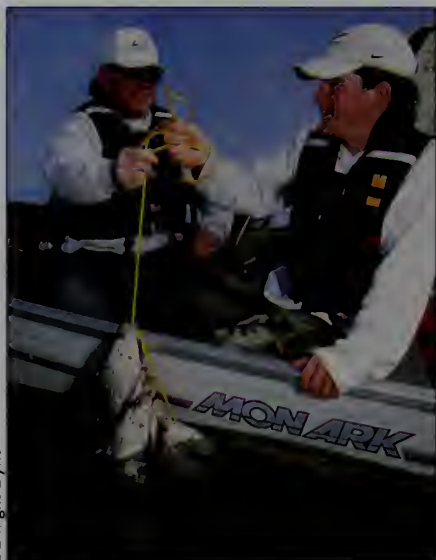
But crappie also thrive in this lake, formed when Gathright Dam was closed on the Jackson River in 1981. Don't go to Moomaw ex-



©Dwight Dyke







pecting large numbers of the speckled perch, but those you do catch will often run an impressive  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 2-pounds in weight. Some fish up to three pounds have even been caught here. In good years Moomaw gives up close to a dozen citation-qualifying crappies. As you would expect from a clearwater lake, black crappies are the predominant species.

Fishing is good around docks in spring and also structures planted by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the Corps of Engineers. Minnows and jigs are both effective offerings.

#### 4. Chickahominy Lake and River

Both the 1,500 acre lake east of Providence Forge and the tidewater river that begins below Walker's Dam are excellent crappie fishing spots. The fish grow big in these tannin-stained waters and a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -pounder is a fairly typical fish. You can also expect to pull in some chunky yellow perch mixed with the crappies, since Chickahominy leads the state in citations for that species.

Leadhead jigs with soft plastic bodies, marabou jigs, spinner-jig combos and live minnows are the top offerings for Chickahominy crappie, whether you're fishing the lake or river. There are no public boat launches on Chickahominy

Lake, but several private marinas offer access, such as Ed Allen's. On the river there are private launches as well as public access at the Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area on Morris Creek, just upstream from the river.

#### 5. Lake Orange

Yes, it's small at 124 acres, but this lake owned by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is a fine choice for northern Virginians searching for crappies. Fertilization increases food production and results in an excellent crop of gamefish, including the black and white speckled perch.

Handicapped and shore-bound anglers enjoy a floating fishing pier here that attracts large numbers of crappie at certain times of year. If you use a boat, the fish attractors planted in the lake are also choice spots. These were refurbished in 1992 and often hold good numbers of crappies. Beaver huts along shore are also excellent places to drop a minnow or jig, especially early in the year when the fish are moving in shallow to spawn.

#### 6. Lake Cahoon

A water supply lake for the City of Portsmouth, this 510 acre reser-

voir is well-known for its bass fishing. It also yielded a state record chain pickerel in 1993 weighing 7 pounds, 8 ounces. But the lake is a top bet for crappies, producing more citations than its neighboring tide-water lakes nearly every year.

Outboards are limited to 10 hp or less, and bank fishing is available near the fishing station. Minnows and jigs can both be effective. In the spring, try the coves. Later in the year, fish the main lake and waters further offshore, drifting or slowly trolling.

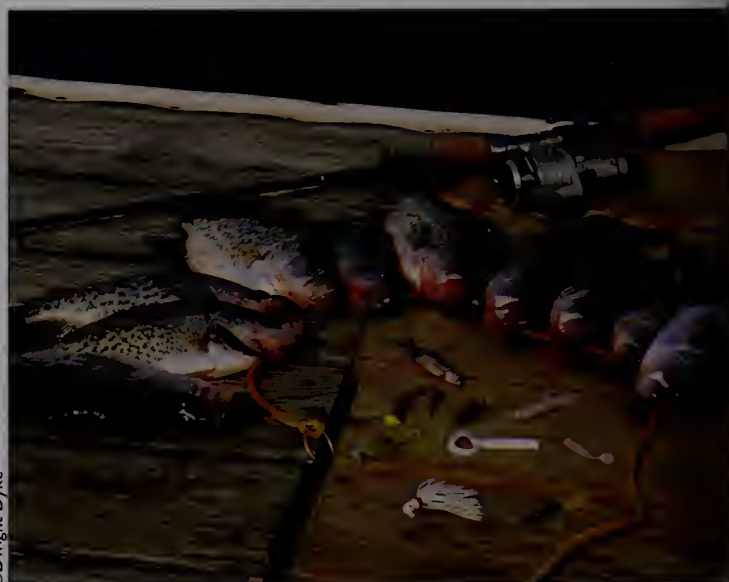
#### 7. Lake Anna

Covering some 9,600 acres, this impoundment is the biggest lake readily accessible to northern Virginians. It offers excellent striped bass and largemouth action, but is also a great spot for crappies.

When this lake was just a few years old back in the early 1970s, my friends and I would launch a johnboat near the Rt. 208 Bridge and not even crank up our small outboard motor. We would simply move with the electric motor or a sculling paddle from piling to piling, often catching 50 to 100 crappies a day.

Lake Anna's crappies are still available in good numbers, but even more impressive, they are now larger fish. The ones we pulled in with our canepoles during the 70s were

*Crappies are not only fun to catch, but are highly sought after for their wonderful taste. Fried, broiled, baked or grilled they're considered to be one of the best eating fish in Virginia.*





about 1/3 pound in weight. Now fish run from 1/2 to 2 pounds. Bridge pilings are still excellent spots to try, especially during fall, winter and summer. In spring it pays to find brushpiles, docks and beaver huts near shore, where the fish are concentrated in shallower water spawning. There are also 14 marked fish structures throughout the lake planted and maintained by the Virginia Power Company. These are good bets for crappies from late spring through winter.

## 8. Occoquan Reservoir

Some of my earliest crappie fishing forays took place on this lake nearly three decades ago as a teenager. In spite of tremendous development of this northern Virginia region, Occoquan still yields quality sport for this species. The 2,100 acre lake offers fish that average 1/2 to 1 pound and they are present in good numbers.

Sunken brushpiles, flooded timber, logjams near shore and docks are all likely to yield fish in spring. Search for dropoffs, deeper brush and bridge pilings in the heat of summer. Both minnows and jigs are good. Boat rentals, bait and tackle as well as launch ramps are available at Fountainhead Park, near Woodbridge, off of Rt. 123. Lake Ridge Park is located off of Davis Ford

Road/Old Bridge Road. Only motors up to 10 hp can be used on Occoquan.

## 9. Drummond

Although its pH is too low for good bass fishing, due to leaching of acids into the water from surrounding peat soils, crappie thrive in this 3,142 acre lake. It's accessible by a feeder ditch off of the Dismal Swamp Canal. The nearest state ramp to the ditch is on the canal off of Rt. 17, south of Deep Creek. Go three miles up the ditch to a lock and self-operated winch that pulls your



©Dwight Dyke

*It doesn't take a whole lot of fancy equipment to enjoy fishing for crappies. For many, the preferred method is simply a cane pole, a good bobber, and a couple dozen small minnows.*

boat up over the dam and onto the lake.

Crappie can grow surprisingly large in Drummond, and biologist Rich Eades feels a potential state record could possibly be lurking in the shallow, bowl-shaped lake. You'll also enjoy catching yellow perch, pickerel and fliers mixed in with the crappies on this darkwater lake. Minnows are the best bet, but soft-plastic grubs on leadheads are also excellent offerings.

## 10. Lake Chesdin

This long, narrow lake covers 3,060 acres and is owned by the Appomattox River Authority. In 1996, the lake produced 26 crappies over the citation size. April was best for giving up fish weighing two pounds or better, with 11 recorded during that month.

Chesdin crappie bite well on minnows, marabou jigs and leadheads with soft plastic bodies. The fish will be concentrated in the shallows this month and into April. Focus on brushpiles and beaver huts. After that, look for them over deeper structure. Besides crappies, you're also likely to catch bass, bluegills, walleyes, catfish and pickerel on Chesdin.

The lake is located mainly in Chesterfield County, west of Petersburg. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries maintains a boat ramp on the south shore near the dam.

Virginia offers many other good crappie fishing waters, but these 10 are definitely worth a try this spring.

*Gerald Almy has been a full-time outdoor writer for more than 20 years. He is currently a hunting and fishing editor on the staff of Sports Afield.*

For additional information on fishing for crappie and other fish like bass, stripers, catfish, and perch, along with how to get to some of Virginia's best lakes, rivers and streams write to the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104 and request the new 1998 Fishing Guide.





# Muzzleloading For Spring

by Denny Quaiff

## The Hunt

With the crows calling, owls hooting and a woodpecker drilling a hole in a hollow tree, I began to think that the gobblers were sleeping in. Then all of a sudden across the swamp a distant gobbler sounded off.

It was the second Saturday of the 1997 spring gobbler season and I was hunting with my long-time hunting partner, Bill Langford. Over the past 30 plus years Bill and I have had many of these experiences and this looked like another text book

opportunity, for this year, the challenge was to bag a big tom with the aid of a muzzleloading black powder shotgun.

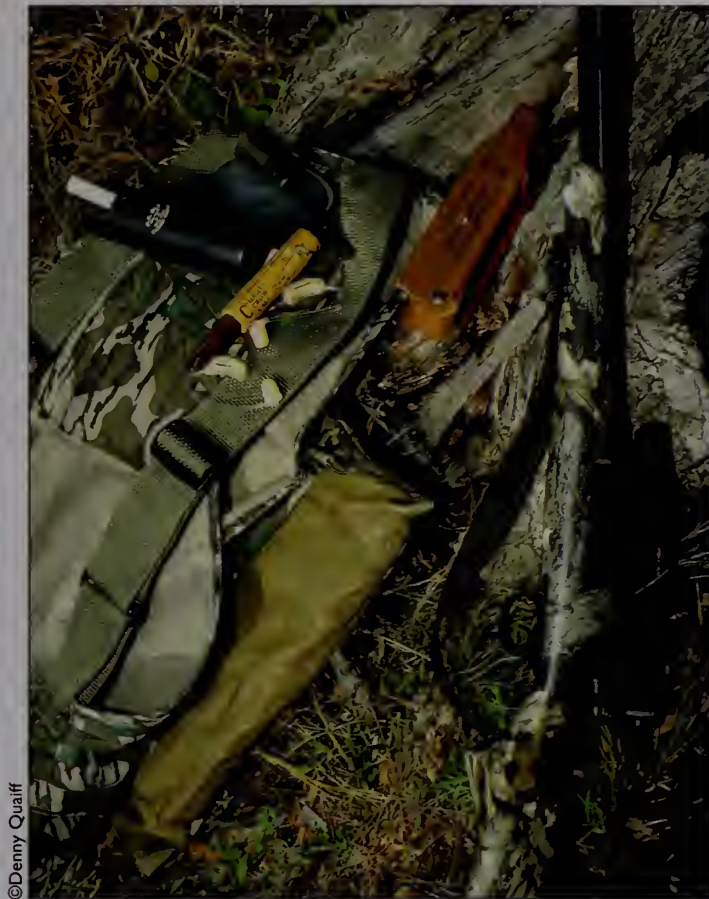
Hoping to get a better location on the lone gobbler, Bill owled. The gobbler answered and we set out across the swamp to a ridge of pines where the turkey was roosting. Ten minutes later we were in position, about 175 yards below the gobbler.

I decided to set-up at the base of a large pine to break up my body outline. The tree was on the edge of an old logging path that was made when a timber company thinned the trees. I was anxious to put my new muzzleloading shotgun through its paces.

Bill positioned himself about 30 yards to my left and started yelping with his diaphragm caller. The gobbler we had heard earlier didn't make a sound. After about 15 minutes, I began to use my Lynch box turkey call while Bill was clucking and purring with his slate call. The gobbler sounded off only about 75 yards in front of us.

Both of us thought that he was coming in when another gobbler opened up back in the swamp. The temptation to call again was strong, but we knew better. The two gobblers had pinpointed our location and appeared to be moving in to fight over what they thought to be the lady-in-waiting.





©Denny Quaiff

# Gobblers

*Chasing spring gobblers with a muzzleloading shotgun makes an already challenging hunt even tougher.*

After a long period of silence, Bill started working his slate caller again with the soft slow purrs of a lovesick hen. All of a sudden like a ghost appearing in the night, I caught sight of movement to my right. The long beard was half strutting and walking. He was slowly moving and closing into shotgun range and I was out of position for a shot. While I was waiting for an opportunity to shift my body to the right, the gobbler went behind a tree just before entering the shooting lane. With one quick move the "smoke pole" was in the ready position.

With the gobbler in the open at 35 yards, I took a deep breath and squeezed the trigger. A thick cloud

of white smoke rolled in front of my eyes blocking my vision. When the smoke had cleared, the prize lay before me.

## Deciding on a Muzzleloading Shotgun

Most of the spring gobbler hunting is done today with factory ammo and modern day centerfire shotguns. The growing popularity of extended muzzleloading deer seasons throughout the country has encouraged hunters to give the already challenging spring gobbler

*Above: Tools of the trade. The modern day turkey hunter has many different tricks in his or her bag to help outsmart spring gobblers.*

season a different twist with a muzzleloading shotgun.

In today's market there are several good selections of black powder smoothbores for the turkey hunter. My choice was the Modern Muzzleloading MK86. The 12-gauge gun came in the Mossy Oak Break-up Camo pattern that blends in well with the spring woods. This hard shooting turkey gun was equipped with an extra full tube choke. It is my opinion that this percussion in-line smoothbore has been designed with the serious turkey hunter in mind.



The Modern Muzzleloading MK86 is known as the Multiple Barrel System. This versatile muzzleloading shotgun barrel can be removed from the receiver and replaced with a .50 or .54 caliber rifle barrel. This feature offers fall deer hunters and spring turkey hunters one gun for both seasons.

Like all Knight rifles the MK86 comes drilled and tapped for mounting a scope. With this in mind I used a set of Knight quick-detachable bases and rings to mount a Pentax zero power light seeker scope on top. With this set-up a hunter can quickly put a gobbler's head in the crosshairs at maximum effective ranges for a clean one-shot harvest.

## Creating a Hunting Load

I spent long hours on the range when I first started hunting white-tails with the muzzleloading rifle, experimenting with different powder charges and bullet combinations. The same responsibility is re-

equal volumes of powder and shot. When talking with my friends at Modern Muzzleloading, they told me of a company named Ballistic Products. This manufacturer offers a one-piece, 12-gauge hunting was designed for tightly-focused patterns of turkey loads. This high volume pattern driver was my choice for the load set-up and proved to make a difference in pattern density.

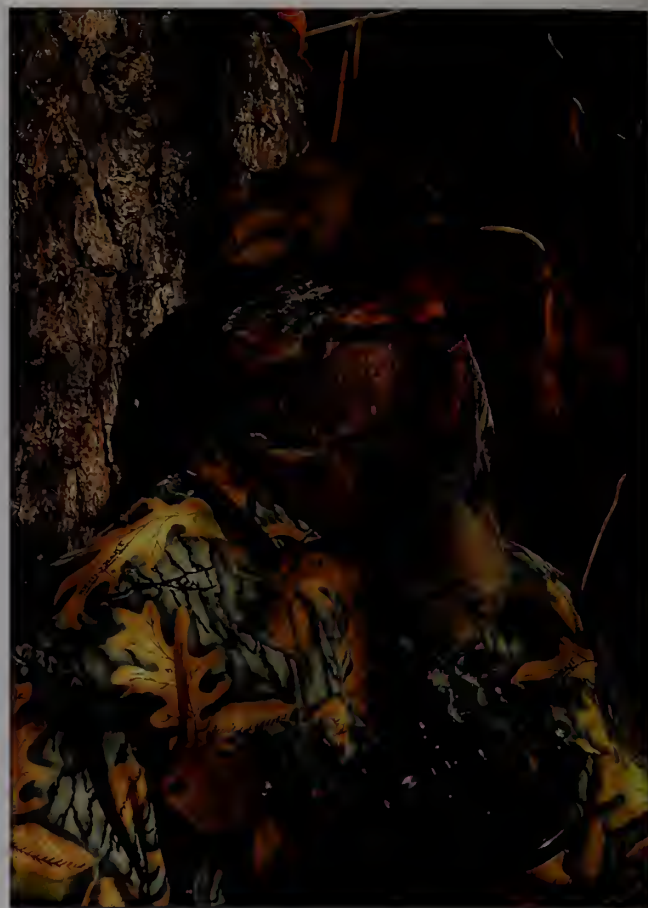
When shooting 110 grains of Pyrodex Select behind a two-ounce load of No. 5 nickel plated shot, I discovered that this muzzleloader would consistently pattern out to 40 yards with 20 to 25 shot in the kill zone of a wild turkey. The amazing thing was that the front loader appeared

on paper to be every bit as capable as my Browning 12 gauge Model 2000 three inch magnum. My favorite shotgun had accompanied me on many successful spring hunts that spanned over 20 years. The range test results of the muzzleloading shotgun was a real confidence builder for the upcoming season.

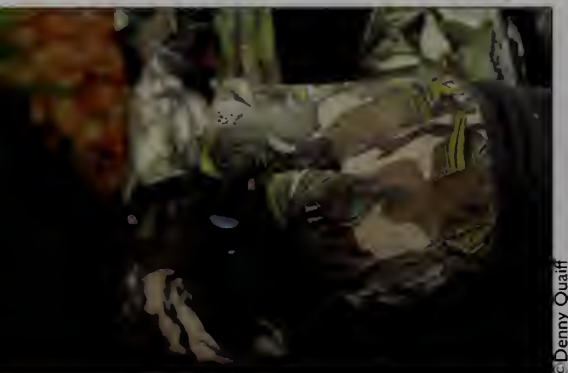
## Hunting Late Season Gobblers

The 1997 spring season was fast coming to an end with only one week remaining. By this time of the year all of the "easy" turkeys were already in some hunter's freezer.

Hoping to get another chance with the muzzleloader, I headed to an area where an old gobbler had been located a few weeks before. Knowing that at this stage of the game it was becoming more difficult to bring a bird into shotgun range I carried a decoy for help. After many



©Dwight Dyke



©Denny Quattr

*Having the proper load in a black powder shotgun can make the difference between success or failure. Serious hunters will take the necessary time to pattern their muzzleloaders before the season to determine what works best.*

quired with a black powder shotgun. The variables with the shotgun are just as complex as with the muzzleloading rifle. Most muzzleloaders seem to have an appetite for different loads and require testing for the best performance.

The muzzleloading industry recommends loading the shotgun with

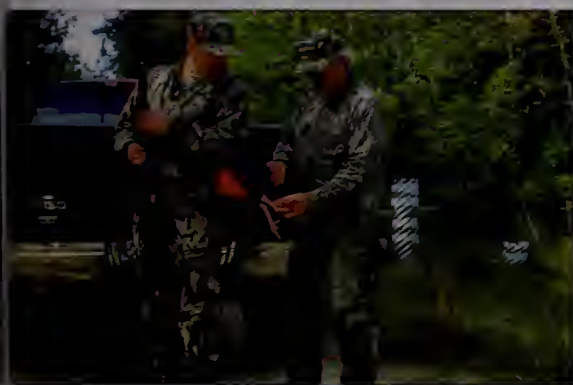
years of hunting and shooting firearms, my hearing is definitely not what it used to be. For the first time I was wearing a set of semi-customized behind-the-ear hearing aids made by Starkey Laboratories.

The whippoorwills were making their presence known and the bright, rose-colored sky was starting to appear in the east. I knew it was time to make something happen. After a series of calls from my owl hooter, a gobbler answered from at least 1000 yards back in the direction of where my truck was parked. With the leaves in full foliage, I would never have heard that gobbler without the new hearing amplification I was wearing.

In order to get a better location I repeated the owl call. The gobbler answered again. Thinking I had a good idea of the gobblers roost tree I took off.

When I got back to where my truck was parked, there was a second gobbler sounding off and both turkeys were on the ground. Mov-





ging road and set up in front of a big pine tree. I started a series of soft clucks and purrs with my slate call. The two gobblers were responding to my every effort, when suddenly a third tom sounded off directly behind my setup tree.

This new player was not more than 50 yards behind me and with my new hearing system he sounded like he was sitting in my lap! The hair stood up on the back of my neck and I didn't dare move not knowing which side he would come from.

Things were too close for comfort, so I stopped calling and waited. The other two gobblers in front of me were gobbling on their own and sounded as if they were entering the back of the field. The third turkey that had come in behind wasn't saying a word. Off to my right, I picked up the sound of the "tight lip" tom dragging his wings and drumming in the road just out of my sight.

Slowly shifting to my right, with the muzzleloader resting across my knee, I was ready. Glancing out of the corner of my eye, I could see the long beard in full strut coming down the road. The mature gobbler had focused his X-ray vision on the decoy and was putting on quite a show.

The decoy was highly visible and the long beard gobbler was completely fooled. The crosshairs in my scope were centered on the blood-red waddles hanging on the front of his throat when he made his final approach into the field. With a steady squeeze of the trigger the boss-gobbler was on the ground.

The muzzleloading shotgun had done the job. With the aid of better hearing to locate long range gobblers and a fully three-dimensional life size decoy to help fool turkeys that had been hunted hard, my first season muzzleloading for spring gobblers had come to a successful end.

When talking with Gary Norman, Virginia's wild turkey project leader, it was very interesting to learn that 68,137 spring gobbler hunters took to the woods during the 1997 season. I was amazed to discover that the harvest data reported 13,359 male turkeys were bagged and only 20 were taken with a muzzleloader.

Black powder hunting with a smoothbore for spring gobblers is not for everyone. However, if the challenge of spring turkey hunting with a modern day magnum shotgun has started to become "old hat," give muzzleloading a try. Who knows, you might like the new contest! □

*Denny Quaiff is executive director of the Virginia Deer Hunters Association and senior editor of their publication, White-tail Times.*

## Equipment Guide

Modern Muzzleloading  
P.O. Box 130  
Centerville, IA 52544  
(515) 856-2626

Hodgdon Powder Company  
P.O. Box 2932  
Shawnee Mission, KS 66201  
(913) 362-9455

Ballistic Products Incorporated  
20015 75th Ave. North  
Corcoran, MN 55340  
(612) 494-9237

Delta Industries, Inc./Turkey  
Decoys  
117 E. Kenwood  
Renwood, IA 50669  
(319) 345-6476

Starkey Laboratories  
6700 Washington Ave.  
Eden Prairie, MN 55344  
1-800-328-8602

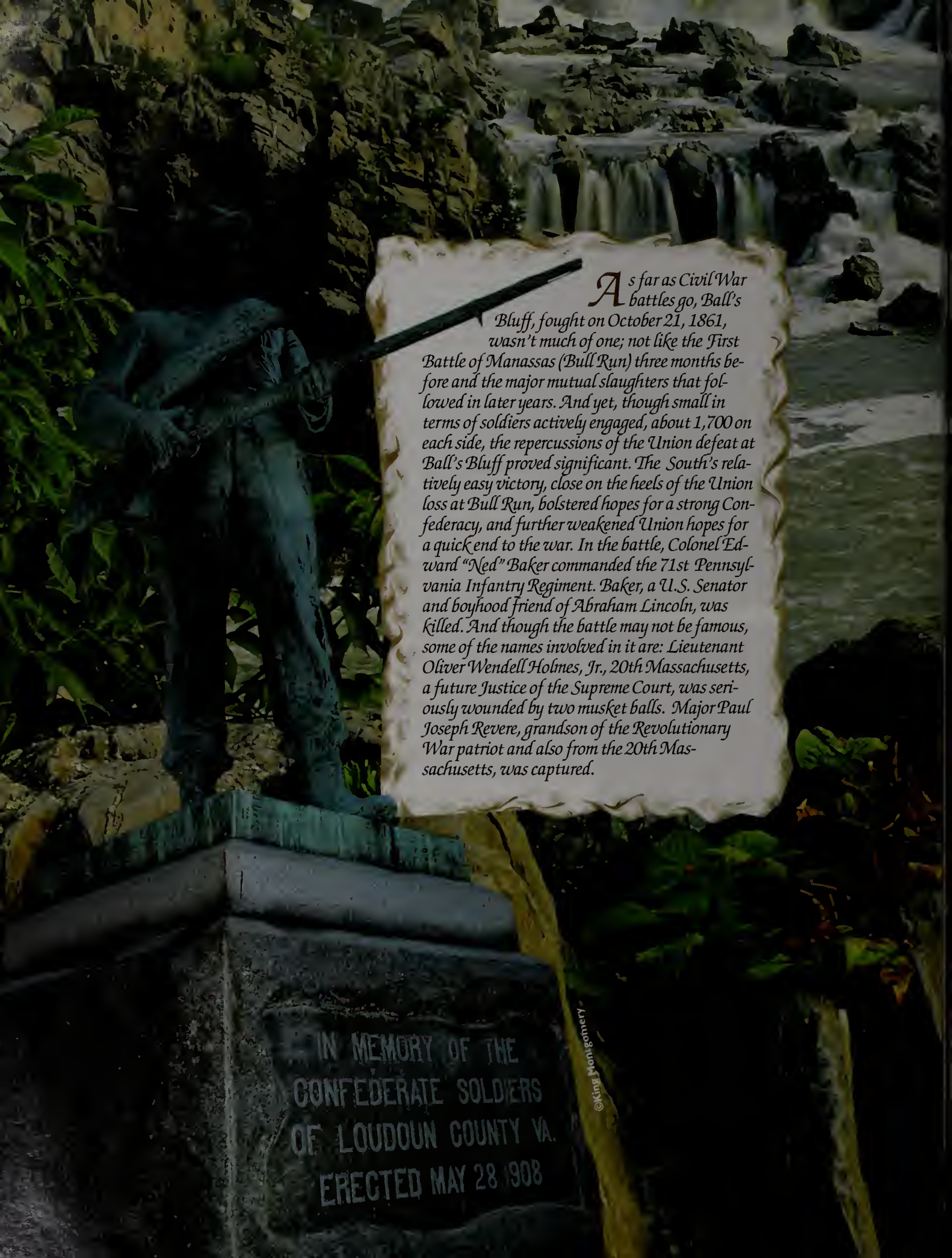
Pentax Corporation  
35 Inverness Drive East  
Englewood, CO 80112  
(303) 799-8000

**Top:** Hunter safety is the most important part of any hunting trip. Successful hunters should always display blaze orange when carrying turkeys in the field. **Bottom:** Hunter success deserves congratulations. The joy of hunting with friends is an experience most hunters cherish. Photos by Denny Quaiff.

ing at a fast pace down the logging road I decided to set the decoy in a small feed patch where I had seen gobblers on several previous hunts.

After setting the decoy in the open field, I backed across the log-





*As far as Civil War battles go, Ball's Bluff, fought on October 21, 1861, wasn't much of one; not like the First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run) three months before and the major mutual slaughters that followed in later years. And yet, though small in terms of soldiers actively engaged, about 1,700 on each side, the repercussions of the Union defeat at Ball's Bluff proved significant. The South's relatively easy victory, close on the heels of the Union loss at Bull Run, bolstered hopes for a strong Confederacy, and further weakened Union hopes for a quick end to the war. In the battle, Colonel Edward "Ned" Baker commanded the 71st Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment. Baker, a U.S. Senator and boyhood friend of Abraham Lincoln, was killed. And though the battle may not be famous, some of the names involved in it are: Lieutenant Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., 20th Massachusetts, a future Justice of the Supreme Court, was seriously wounded by two musket balls. Major Paul Joseph Revere, grandson of the Revolutionary War patriot and also from the 20th Massachusetts, was captured.*

IN MEMORY OF THE  
CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS  
OF LOUDOUN COUNTY VA.  
ERECTED MAY 28 1908



# The Nation's River: The Upper Potomac

by King Montgomery

**F**rom its source high in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia, to Point Lookout, Maryland and Smith Point, Virginia at its mouth on the Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac River flows through 383 miles of American history, and provides some excellent fishing along the way. Cold-water trout ply the higher reaches then give way to warmwater smallmouth bass until the Potomac reaches Little Falls, and becomes an imposing, majestic tidal river. For much of its tidal freshwater stretch, the largemouth bass is king, until the saltwater intrudes from the Chesapeake Bay. Striped bass, knowing no salinity boundaries, range through-

out the river up to the fall line in Washington, D.C., and, as the river nears its juncture with the Bay, saltwater species such as bluefish, spot, and croaker, prevail. The upper Potomac runs from Paw Paw, West Virginia to Great Falls, Virginia, a course of 275 miles.

Several miles east of Leesburg on the upper Potomac River, Harrison's Island splits the Potomac into two channels one along the Maryland side, and the other lapping Virginia's shore. Less than a mile above the northern tip of the island you come to White's Ferry, both a place and a ferry that connects the two states. We launched here at daybreak this fine August morning. Our leisurely fishing trip would take us about five miles south to Edward's Ferry, now defunct as a ferry,

but, like White's Ferry, active during the American Civil War, 137 years ago. It is hard to imagine now, but this area, on the Virginia side of the river, was the scene of one of the earlier battles of the war.



*Large smallmouth bass like this one are commonly seen putting smiles on anglers' faces along the upper Potomac. Background photo by ©Dwight Dyke.*



As the Federal forces moved down Ball's Bluff toward Leesburg, Colonel Nathan G. Evans hurried formations to stop them. The first regiment to attack the Massachusetts troops was Colonel Eppa Hunton's 8th Virginia Infantry, a regiment comprised mostly of Virginia boys from Loudoun and Fairfax counties. A southern officer on the scene described the regiment as, "375 more people in bad temper." That temper would be severely taken out on the Union soldiers as the day progressed. The Federal forces were beaten back to the high bluffs overlooking the Potomac, the battle turned to rout, and hundreds of soldiers were captured, shot, or drowned as they tried to flee across the rain-swollen river to the safety of Harrison's Island.

Today, the sun was just beginning its climb, lighting pink ribbons across the morning sky. A flock of Canada geese headed south, flying in loose formation low to the water. Tim Freese, my friend and guide for the day, turned off the jet outboard motor and we drifted slowly and quietly toward Harrison's Island. I was taking in the calm beauty of sunrise when Tim, who had cast a Tiny Torpedo surface lure toward mid-

stream, whooped as he set the hook on a feisty smallmouth bass. My hastily cast fly rod popper soon accomplished the same.

According to noted angling guide and author Ken Penrod in his book *Fishing the Upper Potomac River*, the smallmouth bass is not native to the Potomac watershed. "It is said that an employee of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad carried 20 smallmouth bass in milk cans from the Wheeling River near Wheeling, West Virginia, via the train and deposited them into the Potomac near Cumberland, Maryland in 1853." Stories of this type for many rivers are told all over the country. Virginians can be glad these railroaders brought bronzebacks to the Potomac, Rappahannock, and Shenandoah Rivers.

The river supports a diverse population of game and non-game fishes. Channel catfish and bullheads join the prolific members of the sunfishes, including smallmouth and some largemouth bass, bluegills, shellcrackers (reardear sunfish), redbreast sunfish, pumpkinseed sunfish, and rock bass, also called redeye and goggle-eye. Carp are abundant and there are several species of minnows, shiners, fallfishes, suckers, and daces. On that

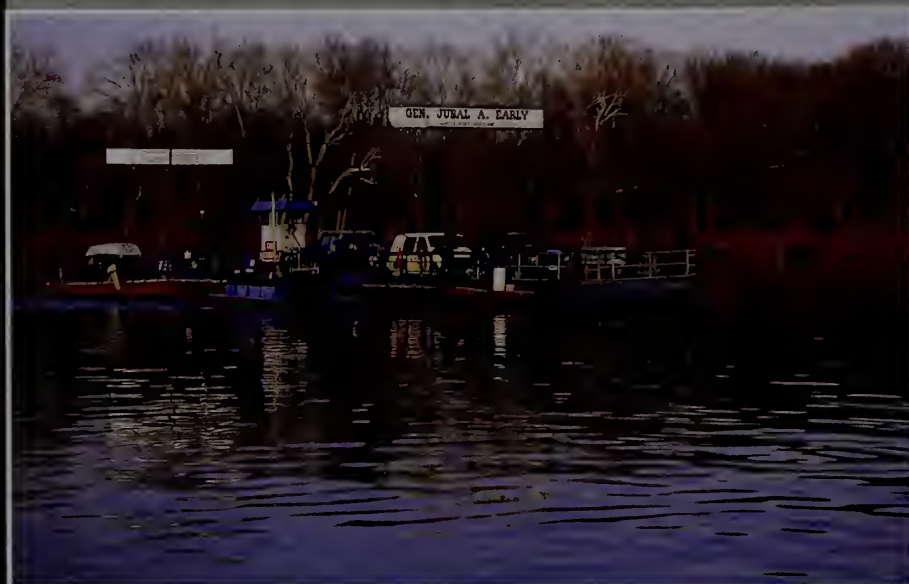
memorable fall day in 1861, no one was thinking about fish.

In contrast now, the river was low and calm on this December 1997 day, a few days before Christmas, as fishing guide Ralph Capaso slid his jetboat into the water at White's Ferry. But its fluctuating water levels had taken their toll on property as well. The old store by the road and boat ramp was usually open at this time of day, but all I saw when I peered through the window was bare floor. A casualty of the high water earlier in the fall, the old building still carried the scars of numerous flood engagements, including at least two inundations in 1996 that occur in such proportions "only once in a century." But the workhorse ferry boat, the *Gen. Jubal A. Early*, continued to ply its cable-bound course between the two shores.

Today the fishing would be fair. No smallmouth bass, but we would land an unusual number of their largemouth cousins, and some chunky bluegills and redbreast sunfishes. We were fishing tube lures on light spinning tackle and Clouser Deep Minnow streamers on the fly rod along the Maryland shore just south of the Dickerson Power Plant warmwater effluent, where the surface water temperature was in the high 50-degree Fahrenheit range. The surrounding water was in the low 40s. All species of fish that swim the upper Potomac River congregate in the warmer water to feed on the plankton, insects, crustaceans, and each other, and anglers, even on the coldest winter day, can usually find a few fish willing to come to fly or lure.

(Left) The ferry, *Gen. Jubal A. Early*, carries cars and people between Virginia and Maryland. A ferry has operated here for centuries.

(Right) Non-boaters can wade the river in the warmer months. Use shoes with good, gripping soles and always wear a personal flotation device. Photos by ©King Montgomery.





The upper Potomac River offers good access and fishing all year along its entire course as the boundary between Maryland and Virginia. Although Maryland "owns" the river, it is a part of us all; shared through the violence between Americans that served, more than any other event in our post-Revolutionary War history, to shape what and who we are today. □

*King Montgomery, a field editor for Virginia Outdoor Weekly and contributing editor for Fly Fish America, is an avid angler and Civil War buff. He lives in Annandale.*


Ball's Bluff Regional Park is part of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NVRPA) system. For more information, call them at (703) 352-5900. The best reference for the battle is Kim Bernard Holien's *Battle at Ball's Bluff*. The book can be ordered by sending a check for \$23 to NVRPA, ATTN: Ball's Bluff, 5400 Ox Road, Fairfax Station, VA 22039.

*Fishing the Upper Potomac River* by fishing guide Ken Penrod can be found in many fly shops, and tackle and sporting goods stores, or call (301) 937-0010 to order or get information on guided fishing trips.

Virginia and Maryland have a reciprocal agreement so your Virginia freshwater fishing license is valid on the upper and tidal Potomac River where it forms the border.

*Soldiers of the 8th Virginia, the 71st Pennsylvania, and the 20th Massachusetts regiments would face each other again in battle at Gettysburg on July 3, 1863, the bloodiest battle of the war, and the beginning of the end for the South. The 8th Virginia shattered itself against the 71st Pennsylvania and 20th Massachusetts as part of General George Pickett's ill-fated charge against the strong Union line on Cemetery Ridge.*





# Early Season Trout Fishing

by Harry Murray

*With careful planning, you can start the new year off right.*

**V**irginia's year-round trout season has appeared to be a great blessing. Many anglers are having abundant success in streams that they had never fished this early. Even with the cold and unpredictable weather of months like February and March, I have been surprised to find fish feeding well on nymphs, streamers and even dry flies.

But like the weather, fishing conditions can change rapidly from week to week. I have found that during this time of year it is very common to be rewarded with great angling one week only to return to the same stream a week later and find conditions so tough that I wondered if the early success had been just a dream or had it actually been as good as I had thought.

The answer was that the earlier action had been exceptionally good





and that now it becomes very demanding. But, what had caused this change? Actually, the answer to this dilemma and how one adapts his fishing tactics to it will directly govern his success.

Early last March our streams were at their normal levels and quite clear and the weather was unseasonably warm. These factors all contributed to ideal feeding conditions for the trout and we simply took advantage of this free gift.

Then, if you remember, by the middle of March it started raining and the cold night temperatures made us all dig out our heavy coats and face the fact that the premature unusually warm spring weather was not with us to stay.

## 1. Evaluate the Weather

Let me explain why I feel it is important to accurately evaluate these weather and stream conditions and learn just which tactics to use when. Every spring I get hundreds of phone calls asking about the existing angling conditions. Usually the fishermen inquire about the current water conditions, water temperatures and insect activity. Then, apparently after digesting this, the angler will decide if these conditions meet his criteria, and whether or not he'll go fishing. I don't think that way. If I'm off work, I go fishing!

## 2. Learn to Handle All Types of Fishing Conditions

Now you can understand why, at least to me, it is important to learn to handle all types of fishing conditions which may arise in the spring.

Let's start with the demanding conditions which can occur early in the season and fish our way into some of the easy action over the next several months.

## 3. Fishing High Cold Streams

High, cold streams call for special tactics for two reasons. First the trout's metabolic need for food is lower in the cold water than it will be when the streams warm, and, secondly, he is not willing to move very far to consume the food he does eat.

It now becomes very apparent that my primary goal under these conditions is to run my fly right in

front of the trout's noses if I expect them to take it.

## 4. Tactics and Flies

There are several different tactics and types of flies I use in this ploy, usually dictated by the size of the stream so let's examine the smaller mountain headwater streams first and then look at the larger stocked streams in the valley floor.

## 5. Nymphs Upstream

We approach the mountain brooks by fishing upstream in order to prevent scaring the trout so a logical tactic which enables us to run our flies along the stream bottom is the upstream dead drift nymphing method. Here a weighted nymph which matches the prevalent food in the stream is cast straight upstream or up and across stream at a very slight angle and allowed to drift back down the stream in a realistic manner, just as if it were a real aquatic insect dislodged from its stream bottom home.

By working with short casts in the 10 to 20-foot range and smoothly retrieving the line at the rate the current is pushing the nymph one can become very proficient at getting the nymph to drift right along the stream bottom. However, detecting the trout's strike is very demanding, for we must see an indication of its take in order to set the hook before it ejects it as a phony.

I've experimented with dozens of aids to alert me to the trout's take but here is the "strike detection system" I've settled on. I use a nine foot leader which has five feet of fluorescent mono in the butt on which I install one Scientific Anglers indicator three feet above



©Dwight Dyke

the nymph and a second one about two feet above the first one. By keeping a tight line down to these indicators and watching them very closely for any unusual movement I'm instantly alerted to the trout's strikes. Thus notified, I quickly set the hook with the fly rod and the line hand.

## 6. Swing Casting

I use a slightly different tactic if I find myself on the side of a pool where the water is either too deep or too fast to wade straight upstream and let me use the dead drifting method.

I call this "swing nymphing," and many of the beginning anglers in my fly fishing schools find this the easiest method with which to take trout from deep pools. This, almost instant, success comes from the fact that when performed properly the "swing nymphing" ploy enables the angler to feel the trout's strike.

The most critical phase of "swing nymphing" is getting yourself into the proper position before making the cast, for once this is mastered the rest is easy. I find that most anglers get the best control of this game if they position themselves almost parallel to the trout's anticipated location and about six to 10 feet to the side. The cast is dropped about five feet upstream of the feeding station and allowed to sink while the rod is extended up and out over the stream to negate the strong currents. As the nymph drifts naturally along the bottom the rod is slowly swung downstream at this same pace, being careful to keep a tight line all the way down to the fly. One still watches the indicators for any hint of a take, but most anglers feel this strike before they see it.

Numerous nymphs are productive in these headwater mountain streams, but I find that I use the Mr. Rapidan Bead Head and Red Squirrel Bead Head Nymphs in sizes 12 and 14 most of the time.

## 7. Fishing Larger Streams

Now let's assume you want to fish some of the larger stocked trout streams and we still have this high, cold water. Keep in mind that the size of the stream does not greatly alter the biological dictates of the

## 8. Fishing Streamers

The basic tactic for fishing streamers is to wade downstream and cast across and slightly downstream. The fly is allowed to sink close to the stream bottom whereupon it is brought to life with a very



Dwight Dyke

Early season trout fishing means that fly-anglers must be prepared for changing weather conditions. This means that anglers should keep a variety of flies to meet these changes. Here are 14 of Harry Murray's favorite early season trout flies.

1. Elk Hair Caddis, size 16. 2. Little Yellow Stonefly, size 16. 3. Olive Strymph, size 10.
4. Black Wolly Bugger, size 10. 5. Quill Gordon, size 14. 6. Blue Quill, size 18.
7. Mr. Rapidan Bead Head, size 14. 8. Mr. Rapidan Parachute, size 14.
9. Mr. Rapidan Dry (regular), size 14. 10. March Brown, size 14. 11. Pearl Marauder, size 10.
12. Gray Fox, size 14. 13. Bead Head Squirrel Nymph, size 14.
14. Casual Dress Nymph, size 10.

trout. These fish must also feed in an efficient manner as do their relatives in the mountain streams. Thus the two nymphing ploys we used in the smaller streams work well here. Frequently, however, I do use some larger nymphs such as a size 10 Casual Dress.

Since minnows are a significant part of these fish's diets, many anglers have good success early in the year with streamers such as the Strymphs, Marauders and Woolly Buggers all in size 10.

slow line hand stripping action which swims the streamers right across in front of the trout. By carefully selecting one's route it is possible to show your streamer to almost every trout in the stream. No, this doesn't mean that each one is going to climb all over your fly, but at least they will see it.

If your favorite large trout streams have some exceptionally deep runs and pools you may need a slightly different tactic if you plan to do all of your trout fishing with a floating fly line.



I utilize a streamer fishing method I call a "bounce retrieve" if I really want to dredge the bottom. With this tactic I wade upstream and cast my streamer up and across stream at a very slight angle. Using well weighted streamers like the Strymps or Marauders, and sometime even adding an extra split shot, I allow the fly to sink to the stream



©Harry Murray

bottom. At this point I begin a slow lifting and dropping of the rod arm about every five feet of the fly's drift to pull the fly up off the bottom and then allow it to sink back. This jiggling action often motivates the trout to solidly strike the streamer. Also, this smooth continuous rod motion helps me keep a tight line on the fly so I can instantly detect the strike and set the hook.

The really deep pools can also be fished effectively with a moderately fast sinking tip fly line with a six foot leader. The primary advantage of using this arrangement is that your tactics, line handling technique, and strike detection is exactly the same as you use with your floating line; there is nothing new to learn. You simply are running your flies deeper than you could with your floating line. The only disadvantage is that

you must purchase the second fly line and reel spool.

## 9. Low and Warmer Water

Once our streams start to drop and the water warms into the lower forties we can expect good surface action in our headwater streams.

Since these streams seldom have an abundance of food, the trout have learned that they must feed upon what Nature provides. They cannot afford to be persnickety. For this reason I usually use a fly which I can easily see on the water and one that floats well. The Mr. Rapidan Parachute and Royal Wulff both sizes 14 are awfully hard to beat early in our seasons.

In order to find more gentle currents many trout locate in the protected flows to the sides of the stream.

For example, one early spring day I hiked very high up into the Blue Ridge Mountains hoping that each hollow I passed would relieve the fast racing little brook beside me of just a little more water so I could eventually find a fishable stream level. Finally, as I was approaching the very top of the mountain I realized that even though the stream still appeared too full to fish it was either give it a try or hike out and call it a day.

You can imagine my surprise when the first pool yielded several beautiful wild brook trout to my Mr. Rapidan dry fly. Although the majority of the water was racing through the pool showing nothing but white water on the surface, the little, six-inch wide flat along my bank held many trout which were willing to feed. This first pool was no fluke for each succeeding pool also produced numerous trout to my dries. As I examined these little avenues along the bank I realized that in many cases those portions of the pools would actually be dry when the stream dropped back to its normal level.

## 10. Where they Are

This showed me just how well the trout instinctively adapt to the existing stream conditions once the water temperature rises enough to prompt them to feed.

A second area which has consistently given me good dry fly fishing early in the season is the upper corner in many pools. Many of these corners are no larger than a Honda's hubcap, but frequently they hold the largest trout in that pool. They are all characterized by being in the extreme head of the pool, immediately to the side of the main flow with a reverse current being shunted across their surfaces. Frequently a huge boulder to the side of the main flow dictates this composition and spotting one of the boulders is my cue to closely scrutinize the currents in order to pinpoint the corner's location.

Once identified, the corner is easy to fish with a dry fly. The game requires getting to within eight to 10 feet of it and dropping the fly dead center, while simultaneously holding the fly line and all of the leader except the last six inches away from the churning currents. A short natural drift is all you need, for the trout will take your fly almost instantly. Remember, he is there to feed, and he is not about to let any morsel escape him.

## 11. The Best Dry Fly-fishing

By mid-April we are into some of the best dry fly fishing of the season. Our much anticipated hatches of Quill Gordons, Little Blue Quills, March Browns, Gray Fox, and several caddis are with us, the stream levels are good, the water temperatures are perfect and best of all...the trout are going like it's feeding time at the zoo.

These ideal conditions prompt the trout to come onto more conventional feeding stations which will provide them with the maximum amount of food available.

## 12. Feeding Stations

The lip of the pool is one such feeding station. Being located in the extreme lower portion of the pool any drifting natural food is funneled across this lip area. The trout will not locate in the middle of the force of the current on these lips but, rather, will choose to hold either in front of or beside boulders close to the main flow. This protected feeding station will enable the trout to easily sip in any drifting insects with a minimal effort.

This lip feeding station may teach you more about serious trout fishing than any other area in any size stream, for these trout are here to feed. Our goal is to simply drift our flies over these trout in a natural manner without scaring them. Obviously this means we must approach each pool very cautiously until we are at the precise position which will enable us to be in complete control of the placement and drift of the fly. Approaching a lip too closely obviously spooks the trout which chases him off his feeding station. However, making ones cast from too far away may permit the line or leader to fall upon mixed stream currents which cause the fly to behave in an unnatural manner upon the surface. This "dragging" fly action will not only dissuade the trout from feeding upon it, but in many cases it actually scares the trout causing him to scurry for cover. Simply stated: the closer you get to the feeding station the better control you have, but the more apt you are to spook him. Only experience will give you a realistic evaluation of this phase of angling. But this knowledge is invaluable.

As you can imagine, this abundance of food and ideal feeding conditions prompt the trout to locate in many areas throughout the pools and to feed aggressively upon the surface. Their delicate riseforms flagged by tiny dispersing concentric rings signal their locations and quickens our pulses.

Many of the headwater streams in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest and the Shenandoah National Park provide this excellent action during the spring in the Old Dominion.

## 13. Large Valley Streams

Larger streams in the valley floors often provide good surface action in late-spring, brought on by the lower water levels and the abundance of natural insects upon the stream surface. Also, many of the trout in these streams are stocked by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and by this time of the season they are well adapted to our streams and the natural foods they provide.

ic fish or cast his flies to the areas he suspects will hold trout.

I use both of these tactics. If there is a dense hatch of aquatic insects prompting the trout to feed aggressively upon the surface I prefer to identify a specific trout and go one-on-one with him until either I catch him, or he proves to me that he's too smart for me. If the hatch is sparse and I see few rising trout I'll ply my flies to those feeding stations I suspect hold trout. Productive flies for me on these large streams at this time of the year are the Mr. Rapidan Parachute and Elk Hair Caddis in sizes 14 and 16 and Little Yellow Stoneflies in size 16.

Truly, the Old Dominion offers some of the finest early season trout fishing any angler could desire. From her tiny tumbling brooks high in her rugged mountains to her



©Harry Murray

*During the early season when stream levels are higher than normal, using moderately fast sinking tip fly line can greatly increase your effectiveness in bigger pools of water.*

Many anglers anxiously anticipate these trout rising to the good hatches of Little Yellow Stoneflies and assorted Caddisflies which emerge from these larger streams late in the spring. One can either simply scan the water to find a feeding trout and then cast to that specif-

larger rivers meandering through her lush valley meadows there is angling to satisfy every taste. One simply needs to venture forth and take advantage of it. □

*Harry Murray is a nationally renowned freelance writer who teaches the art of fly-fishing in Edinburg, VA.*





## Richmonder Wins Fall River Renaissance Photo Contest.

By Bonnie Phillips  
Department of Conservation and Recreation

Brit Stegg of Richmond won the statewide Fall River Renaissance Photography Contest's "Best In Show" award for her black and white scenic, "Cattails." Ms. Stegg won a weekend in a Virginia State Park cabin.

Photographs were judged in two categories. Carl Faller of Bealton won first for "Volunteers in Motion" category, and Frank Wilson of Richmond won first place for "Favorite Virginia Waterways" category. The statewide photography competition sponsored by Richmond Camera is held annually as part of the Fall River Renaissance campaign.

The 1997 Fall Renaissance campaign resulted in a tremendous outpouring of volunteers from across Virginia. Held annually the month of October, the campaign recognizes citizens for their efforts in cleaning up and enhancing Virginia's waters. All of Virginia's natural resource agencies, as well as the Department of Forestry participated. Approximately 200 volunteer projects were conducted

ed throughout the Commonwealth, and more than 11,000 Virginians were involved. These volunteers, working in their own communities, wildlife areas, state parks, or other locations, restored vegetative buffers along streams and rivers, improved habitat for fish and wildlife, picked up litter and debris, conducted educational workshops and much more.

When you consider their combined labor and thousands of hours of effort, their volunteer service was of enormous value to their communities and the Commonwealth. □



*The Honorable Joyce K. Crouch is pictured above with Officer Beth Williams, game warden in Westmoreland County. Ms. Crouch, who recently retired from the House of Delegates was honored at the recruit graduation ceremony held recently in Lynchburg. "Joyce Crouch has been a friend and supporter of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries for many years," stated Director Bill Woodfin. "Her guidance and leadership in the House will be greatly missed and we wish her the best in her future endeavors," he added.*

## Fly-Fishing/Fly-Tying Seminars

For the third year, the Bill Wills Chapter of Trout Unlimited and Federation of Fly Fishers, Fly Fishing Virginia, the City of Chesapeake Department of Parks and Recreation and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries have teamed up to present several fly-

fishing and fly-tying seminars. The seminars provide instruction on selecting the right fly-fishing equipment and how to use it, how to tie flies, what flies work best in certain circumstances, and places to go fishing.

Participants (of all ages) get to tie their own fly and practice casting with a fly rod. All materials are provided and there is no cost to participate. The next seminar is scheduled for March 7th. These seminars are held between November and April at Northwest River Park in Chesapeake to coincide with the trout stocking season in the park lake. The lake is stocked with trout ten times during this period as part of the Department's Urban Fishing Program. For more information on Northwest River Park and program schedules call (757) 421-7151. Information on the Urban Fishing Program and trout stocking is available at VDGIF offices. □

## News You Can Use

Sign up for a wildlife photography workshop! The Maymont Foundation in Richmond, Virginia will be hosting a series of photography workshops taught by Lynda Richardson. A Beginning Wildlife Photography class will take place on Saturday, May 30th from 9 to 5. The Advanced Wildlife Photography workshop follows on May 31st from 9 to 5. Both classes include lunch, outline materials and a critique session to be held June 13th. Classes are \$75 for nonmembers and \$60 for members of the Maymont Foundation. A special children's photography workshop will be held on Saturday, June 6th from 10 to noon. Classes are limited to 20 and will fill quickly so sign up soon. For more information, please call Maymont at (804) 358-7166. □



## Painting With Light

Wildlife and nature photography classes to be offered by Virginia's own Bill and Linda Lane.

If you want a point and shoot photograph, use a computer. If you want to experience the moment, capture life as it unfolds naturally and then claim the photo as truly your own, then learn to use your camera.

Have you ever sat under the shelter of an old oak or spruce watching the soft light of morning as it breaks? Have you ever sat in the stillness of the morning fog as the sun begins to glow and watch life unfold or ventured into a field of brightly colored wildflowers. Well the chances of experiencing these sensations behind a computer are slim to none.

If you're looking for a way to spend some quality time in the outdoors with a camera and improve your photography skills, then you may want to picture this. Bill Lane of Montpelier, Virginia, a nationally accomplished nature and wildlife photographer will be hosting a series of wildlife photography classes. Since 1993 Bill and his wife, Linda, have offered weekend workshops throughout the year in Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky and starting this year the Great Smokey Mountains.

This year in Virginia, classes will be held at four of Virginia's State Parks: Westmoreland State Park, May 1,2,3; Douthat State Park, September 18,19, 20; Hungry Mother State Park, October 2,3,4 and False Cape State Park on November 6,7,8. To receive a brochure and further information call (804) 883-7740. □



The Virginia Department of  
Game & Inland Fisheries  
Virginia Women in the Outdoors Program  
presents

## A Fly-Fishing Weekend for Women

April 3-5, 1998

at Camp Blue Ridge near Staunton, Virginia

A three-day weekend learning and practicing the skills of fly-fishing. Session topics to include: Basic Equipment, Casting, Knot Tying, Fly-Tying, Stream & Lake Ecology, VDGIF Hatchery Tour, plus an on-stream fly-fishing trip.

## Fly-Fishing Day Clinic for Women

April 18, 1998

at Locust Shade Park near Quantico, Virginia

A day of casting, knot tying and fishing in Locust Shade Lake

Registration is required for both events. Space is limited.

For more information contact: Libby Norris, VDGIF  
(757) 253-7072

## This workshop is for you if...

You are a beginner who wants to improve your skills.  
You would like to try some new outdoor activities  
You are looking for the camaraderie of like-minded individuals  
You are searching for fun and adventure in a non-threatening atmosphere



# RECIPES

by Jone Cone

## Duck Breasts Made Easy

While larger ducks are excellent roasted whole, some sportsmen prefer to eat the breasts only. When this is done, it pays to save the livers and lower half of the ducks. These thigh/leg quarters can be utilized for preparing stock. Using a pressure cooker, this meat will become tender enough for easy boning, perfect for use in a casserole.

Steve Griggs of Williamsburg was kind enough to provide me with duck breasts for this meal.

### Menu

*Sherried Duck Breasts*

*Microwave Cauliflower With Sauce*

*Three Citrus Tossed Salad*

*Chocolate Nut Strudel*

### Sherried Duck Breasts

- 2 boneless whole large wild duck breasts or 4 small breasts, split in half
- Salt and pepper
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup cream sherry
- 2 tablespoons raspberry preserves
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chopped onion

Sprinkle breast halves with salt and pepper. In a small mixing bowl, combine sherry and raspberry preserves; set aside. In a 10-inch skillet, melt butter over medium high heat. Add duck breast halves and cook for 3 minutes. Turn breasts over and add onion. Cook for 3 minutes or until meat is lightly browned. Pour sherry mixture over breasts and cook for 8 minutes or until meat is desired doneness and liquid is slightly reduced. To serve, slice breast halves and serve over hot, cooked pasta. Top with onion and sauce in skillet. Makes 4 servings.

### Microwave Cauliflower With Sauce

- 1 Reynolds Oven Bag, small size (10 x 16-inches)
- 1 tablespoon flour
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup grated Parmesan cheese
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 cup water
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine, diced
- 1 small head cauliflower, (2 pounds)
- 1 medium red bell pepper, cut into strips

Shake flour in oven bag and place in a 12 x 8 x 2-inch microwave-safe baking dish. Add cheese, thyme, salt, cayenne pepper, water and butter to bag. Squeeze oven bag to blend in flour. Place cauliflower in center of oven bag. Turn oven bag to coat cauliflower with sauce. Arrange pepper strips in an even layer with cauliflower in center of oven bag. Close oven bag with nylon tie and make six  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch slits in top. Microwave on HIGH power 14 to 20 minutes or until vegetables are tender, rotating dish after 7 minutes. Let stand in oven bag for 2 minutes. To serve, cut cauliflower in wedges, spoon pepper strips and sauce over top. Makes 4 servings.

### Three Citrus Tossed Salad

- 1 medium head romaine lettuce, torn in bite-size pieces
- 1 grapefruit, peeled, cut in quarter-cartwheel slices
- 1 orange, peeled, cut in quarter-cartwheel slices
- 1 small avocado, peeled, sliced crosswise
- Lemon Sesame Dressing

In a large bowl, combine all salad ingredients; chill. To serve, toss with

Lemon Sesame Dressing. Salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle with toasted sesame seeds, if desired. Makes 6 servings.

### Lemon Sesame Dressing:

- Juice of 1 lemon (3 tablespoons)
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon honey

Combine all ingredients in a small jar with lid. Shake well. Makes about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup dressing.

### Chocolate Nut Strudel

- $\frac{1}{2}$  package Pepperidge Farm Frozen Puff Pastry Sheets (1 sheet)
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tablespoon water
- 4 squares semi-sweet baking chocolate
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 tablespoon butter or margarine
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chopped walnuts

Thaw pastry sheet at room temperature 30 minutes. Heat oven to 375°. Mix egg and water in a small bowl. Microwave chocolate, milk and butter in a large bowl on HIGH power for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 minutes or until chocolate is almost melted, stirring halfway through heating time. Stir until chocolate is completely melted. Unfold pastry sheet on lightly floured surface. Roll into a 16 x 12-inch rectangle. Spread chocolate mixture evenly on pastry to within  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch of edges. Sprinkle walnuts over chocolate. Starting at short side, roll up jelly-roll style. Place seam-side down on ungreased cookie sheet. Tuck ends under to seal. Brush with egg mixture. Bake 35 minutes or until golden. Cool 30 minutes on cookie sheet on wire rack. Sprinkle with powdered sugar, if desired. Slice and serve warm. Serves 8. □



# Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

## Photographing Virginia's Fabulous Fauna

As you saw in the past January issue of *Virginia Wildlife* magazine, the "Wild and Wonderful Virginia" photography contest was a great success. One thing I learned from that contest was that there are a lot of people who like to photograph critters. "Wonderful Wildlife" was our largest category. With that in mind, I've decided to focus this year's contest on "Virginia's Fabulous Fauna."

This year's theme is critters and I've divided it into three categories: "Birds of a Feather," "Marvelous Mammals" and "Cold and Clammy Critters."

1. **"Birds of a Feather"** Photographs of any birds native to and photographed in Virginia. (No domestic birds, please.) Try to capture birds in motion whether flying, fighting, or grabbing a meal. Photograph that spring gobbler before bagging him. Shoot closeups of his magnificent plumage. Set up a bird feeder near a window you can shoot from. Try for a full body shot of that red-bellied woodpecker. Call in an owl. The possibilities are endless.

2. **"Marvelous Mammals"** I know people will want to photograph the "easier" species such as deer and squirrels. How about trying for something different? Set up a remote camera along a muskrat path in the marsh. Have the muskrat take his own picture! Can you capture a portrait of a bobcat or red fox? How about a mouse feeding on seeds. A skunk gearing up to spray a pesky photographer. (Just kidding!) This category is a real challenge!

3. **"Cold and Clammy Critters"** Photograph animals which aren't the average subjects for photography. Try your hand at shooting close-ups of that rainbow trout you just landed. How about eye level shots of the ghost crabs you see on

the beach? Prowl a pond at night to capture a croaking bullfrog. Watch the fields of flowers for butterflies and bees. This category focuses on the cold-blooded critters in our environment. Think of something you've never photographed before and give it a try. Shoot day or night!

Now for the rules.

1. Each photographer may enter up to five slides per category.

2. All photographs submitted must have been taken in Virginia within the past five years.

3. Photographs may be submitted in any slide/transparency format such as 35mm, 2¼ or 4X5. If you don't want to send original slides, reproduction quality duplicates are acceptable. Please mark all slides to indicate if they are duplicates or originals and note this on your delivery memo. Color and/or black and white prints up to 5X7 may be submitted as well.

4. Slides should be submitted in clear plastic storage sheets for ease of handling by judges.

5. All contest entries must be listed on a piece of paper or "delivery memo" with your name, address and phone number. Each slide must be individually listed stating the category in which it is entered and any details of how and where the image was taken. If possible, please include camera type, make and model, lens and settings used to take the photograph.

6. We prefer that all photographs taken are of wild animals in the wild but will accept photographs of animals taken under "controlled conditions" or in captive situations. Shots of wild animals in the wild are given preference over

captive shots. Wild animals **should not** be captured for the sole purpose of photographs for this contest. If you do photograph captive or "controlled" animals this **must** be stated in the delivery memo.

7. All entries must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) for return of your photographs. Submissions without SASE will not be returned! If return is by Fed Ex (or other courier), please include a form already filled in with your name, address, and photo number. Please do not send money, checks or loose stamps.

8. Deadline for submission is by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, October 23, 1998. All submissions, except the winning entries, will be mailed back by December 31, 1998. Winning entries will appear in the January 1999 issue of *Virginia Wildlife* magazine and will be returned by March 30, 1999.

9. Mail your contest entries to: 1998 Photo Tips Contest, c/o *Virginia Wildlife Magazine*, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA., 23230-1104. Courier address is: 1998 Photo Tips Contest, c/o *Virginia Wildlife Magazine*, 4010 W. Broad Street, Richmond, VA., 23230. I would recommend sending and returning your slides by certified or registered mail or by a courier which uses a tracking number to locate lost packages.

10. Neither *Virginia Wildlife* magazine, Lynda Richardson, or any other assigned contest judges will be responsible for the receipt of damaged photographs or the return of photographs not accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Now get on out there and have fun photographing the "Fabulous Fauna of Virginia!" Good luck! □





# On The Water

by Kathy Gillikin, Boating Safety Instructor

## Boating on Virginia's Waterways

### Interesting Virginia Boating Facts

- 500 Miles of Coastline
- 3,200 Miles of Rivers
- 160 Man-made and Natural Lakes
- Numerous Ponds and Reservoirs
- 229,000 Registered Boats (65' and under in length)
- State Boat—Chesapeake Bay Deadrise, adopted in 1988
- 213+ Public Boat Access Areas
- 250 Nationally Approved Boating Safety Courses were held in 1997.

### Pre-season Motor Check

During the winter/spring is the best time to provide maintenance to your outboard motor since it is out of commission anyway. Here are some things to check in preparation for 1998's boating season.

- ✓ Clean carburetor.
- ✓ Clean fuel filter.
- ✓ Empty fuel tank and clean.
- ✓ Clean and replace spark plugs and points.
- ✓ If applicable, empty cooling system.
- ✓ Clean and lubricate electric starter.
- ✓ Clean battery and cable terminals.

- ✓ Check oil level if applicable.
- ✓ Wipe metal surfaces with lightly oiled cloth.
- ✓ Check screw in plugs on lower unit gear core.

### Be Part of the Water Pollution Solution!

Remember, besides polluting our water and spoiling our water supply and food source, water pollution can be expensive. Some of the fines are listed below.

Spilling fuel into the water ... \$250  
Leaking hydraulic oil into the river ..... \$250

### 1996 Boating Accident Statistics

- 208 Accidents Involving 269 Boats
- 13 Fatalities; No PFD worn in 11 of 13.
- 161 Total Injuries (Medical Help Required Beyond First Aid)
- #1 Causes of Accidents: Inattention, Inexperience and Excessive Speed
- Most accidents occurred on calm, clear days with light winds and good visibility.



©Dwight Dyke

# MARCH *Atfield*

by Jack Randolph

This is one of the biggest months of the year for freshwater fishermen. Most fish, including largemouth and smallmouth bass, the perches and others are loaded with roe and feeding heavily in preparation for the spawning season which is nearing quickly. Veteran bass fishermen know that this month and April are the months to catch the biggest bass of the year. An exception is Back Bay where the larger bass are found in late April and early May.

Early March will find two of our leading big bass lakes, Briery Creek and Lake Conners, refilling after a winter draw down for weed control. Last spring was somewhat disappointing at both lakes as neither produced many of their vaunted lunkers, but perhaps this year will be different.

Early in the month the small ponds will commence to produce some lunker bass, but before long such waters as the Chickahominy, and Suffolk Lakes and lakes Gaston, Anna and Buggs Island will be making their contributions.

Yellow perch, virtually ignored all year, are the objects of considerable attention in March. If it is a citation or a state record that you are seeking Lake Moomaw is well worth your attention. One weighing 2 pounds, 5 ounces was caught and released there last autumn and Larry Andrews at the Bait Place near the lake says two pound yellow perch are not all that uncommon there.

If you are more interested in quantity than size the waters of the Chickahominy are a good bet. My first choice would be below Walkers Dam, but some good numbers are taken in the lake. Of course, the Mattaponi River below Aylett is well-known for its spring perch run and

there have been years when the Pamunkey River has been just as good. Still waters that are gaining reputations for their yellow perch are Little Creek Reservoir in Toano and Waller Mill Reservoir in Williamsburg.

Landlocked striped bass don't start their spawning runs until late in the month and, true to their cold-blooded nature, they hit well throughout the month. White bass also do well this month with some of the best action to be found in the upper reaches of Buggs Island Lake in the vicinity of Bluestone Creek.

White perch commence their spring run a bit later in the month. The most faithful crew of white perch fishermen can be found during the later two weeks of March fishing with bits of bloodworms in the Rappahannock River in Fredericksburg. Excellent runs of white perch also occur in the James River near the I-95 Bridge in Richmond

and in the Appomattox River near the powerhouse in Petersburg.

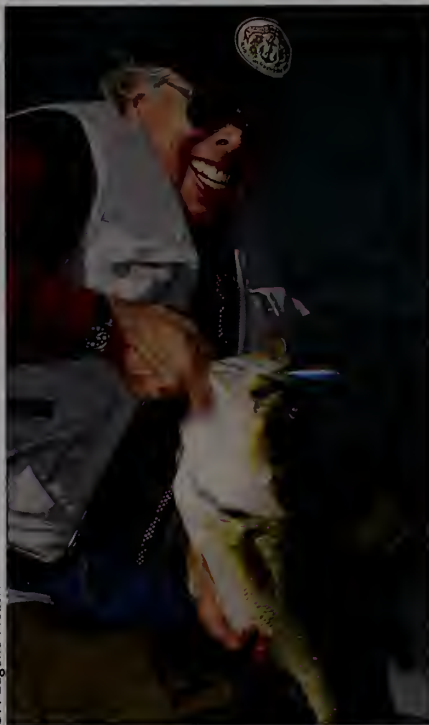
Huge blue catfish are on the move this month. Last year at this time blue catfish weighing up to 61 pounds were caught and released in the James River near Dutch Gap. Most of the serious fishermen weigh their catches in their boats and immediately release them. For his reason many, if not most blue catfish landed are not reported. The Rappahannock above Port Royal also holds giant cats.

There were also some big flat-head catfish caught last year in March. A pair, weighing 41 and 42 pounds were caught in the upper reaches of Buggs Island Lake. Flat-heads are commonly caught in the Staunton River, the James from the I-95 Bridge upstream and in Occoquan Reservoir.

No mention of March would be complete without considering crappie. March can be an exceptional month for these fish. One topping 3 pounds was taken at Lake Chesdin last March and crappie in quantity are usually found during March in Buggs Island Lake, Lake Gaston, Lake Anna and the tidal rivers and creeks. Lake Moomaw in Bath and Alleghany counties is a dark horse for giant crappies.

Although few gunshots are heard in March the season for hunting crows on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays remains open through March 21. Less available than crows, snow geese are also fair game until March 10.

Last year we reminded bird enthusiasts to give their feeders a thorough cleaning with a solution of bleach and water. Transmission of diseases among birds, particularly finches, is a continuing problem and clean bird feeders is part of the solution. □



©F. Eugene Heater





# Naturally Wild

by Spike Knuth



## Eastern Phoebe

One of the "early birds" of spring is the hardiest of the flycatchers, the eastern phoebe. It may arrive from points south as early as early February in Virginia's mountains. In the milder piedmont and tidewater forests, it may stay all winter. Since its main diet consists of flying insects, it lives mainly near water where insect hatches occur at all times of the year. It also feeds on caterpillars, beetles and other crawling insects. In the pinch, it probably feeds on dried wild fruits, especially small berries.

Trout anglers and hikers come in contact with this plain-looking bird regularly. It's a medium-sized, nondescript bird that flits quietly away from and around a hiker as he or she walks a trail near an outbuilding, or from a stream angler as he or she approaches a bridge or culvert. The phoebe is nearly silent during the cold months, uttering only a clear, sharp "chip" call when its domain is invaded. It has a special liking for water, especially running water, and it spends most of its day near it.

The eastern phoebe is basically a dark grayish-olive above, with yellowish-white underparts. The top of its head is a darker olive-brown and is large in comparison to the rest of its body. It has no conspicuous wing bars and no eye ring, which sets it apart from its other flycatcher relatives. The phoebe sits upright and has the habit of bobbing or jerking its tail while perched.

During courtship it will erect its head feathers giving it a crested or shaggy-headed appearance. At this time the male sings his song fairly constantly—a clear, "fee bee-pe wit"—repeated many times with the second part either ascending or descending in pitch.



Spike Knuth

This bird has adapted well to man's incursions into its territory. It has taken well to nesting on man-made structures. It builds on the window sills, shutters—any type of ledge—on cabins in the woods or cottages along a lake shore, in barns or in sheds. It especially uses bridges over streams and culverts. Because it builds nests mainly of moss and mud, lined with grass, hair and feathers, it can plaster the nest against a flat wall much like a barn swallow. Natural nest sites include rock ledges or upturned tree roots, but almost always near water.

Both parents incubate the average of five eggs which are white, speckled with dark brown at the large end. They raise two broods and often use the same nest year after year, refurbishing and adding to it each time. Because of this, they and their young are parasitized by mites that thrive in the old nests.

The eastern phoebe is found throughout the eastern United States to the Great Plains, and in Canada from MacKenzie east to Nova Scotia, and south to the Gulf Coast. In Virginia it inhabits forest habitats near water statewide. □

# IT'S TAX TIME!

## *Remember the Virginia Nongame Tax Checkoff*

If you are due a tax refund from the Commonwealth of Virginia, you can take advantage of this opportunity to contribute to nongame wildlife management and conservation by simply marking your tax return in the appropriate place, ( Schedule 1, Form 760, Line B. Virginia Nongame Wildlife Program).

All funds for Virginia's Nongame Wildlife Program are generated by donations and a tax checkoff on the Virginia State Income Tax Form.

When you do this you are supporting the essential research and management of Virginia's native birds, fishes, and other nongame animals, that make Virginia's outdoors a unique place.

Remember the Nongame Wildlife Tax Checkoff as you do your Virginia state taxes this year, and support Virginia's Nongame Wildlife Program.

